THOUGHTS & IMAGES

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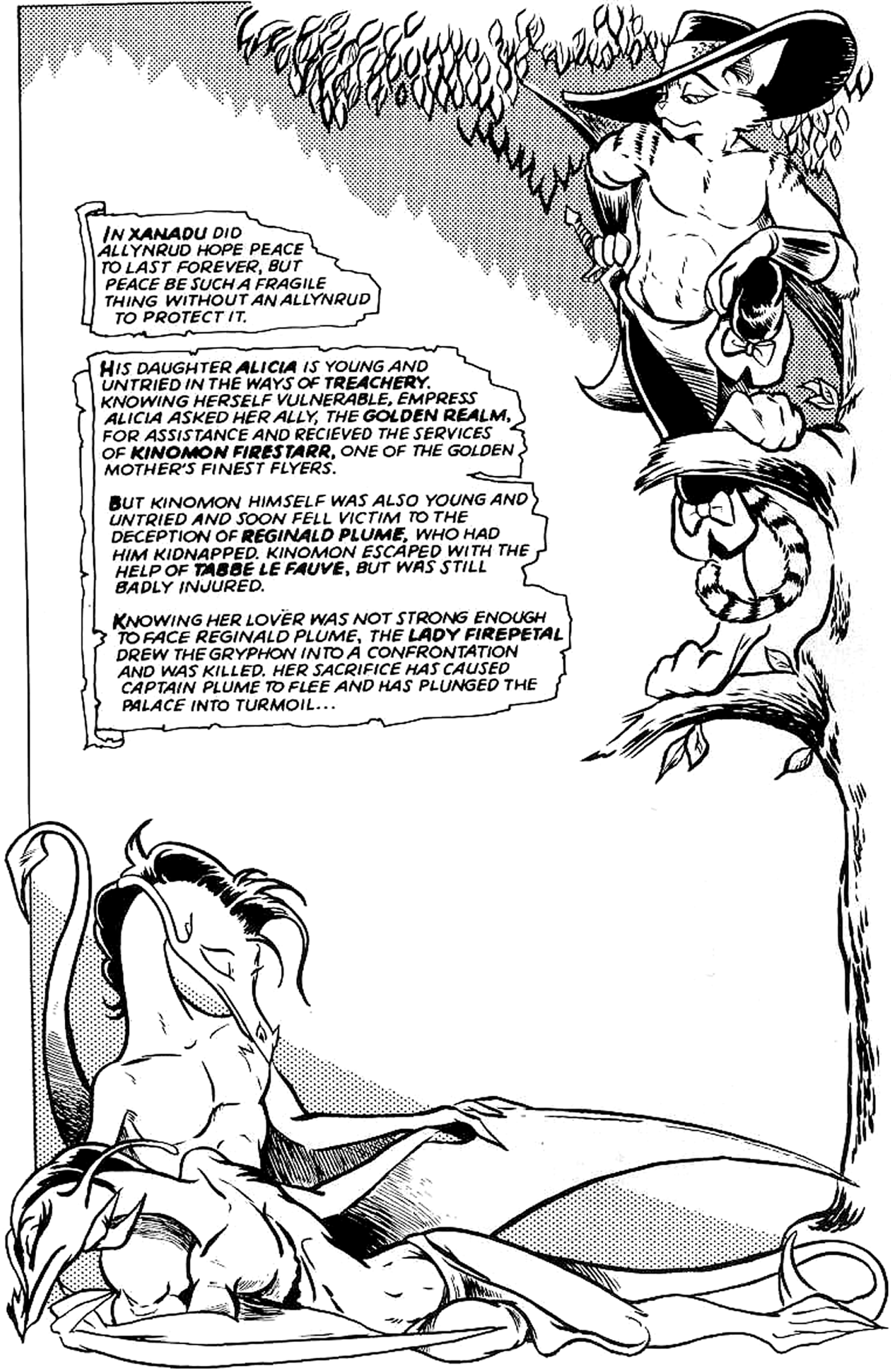
XANADU

Part Four of a Five – Issue Limited Series



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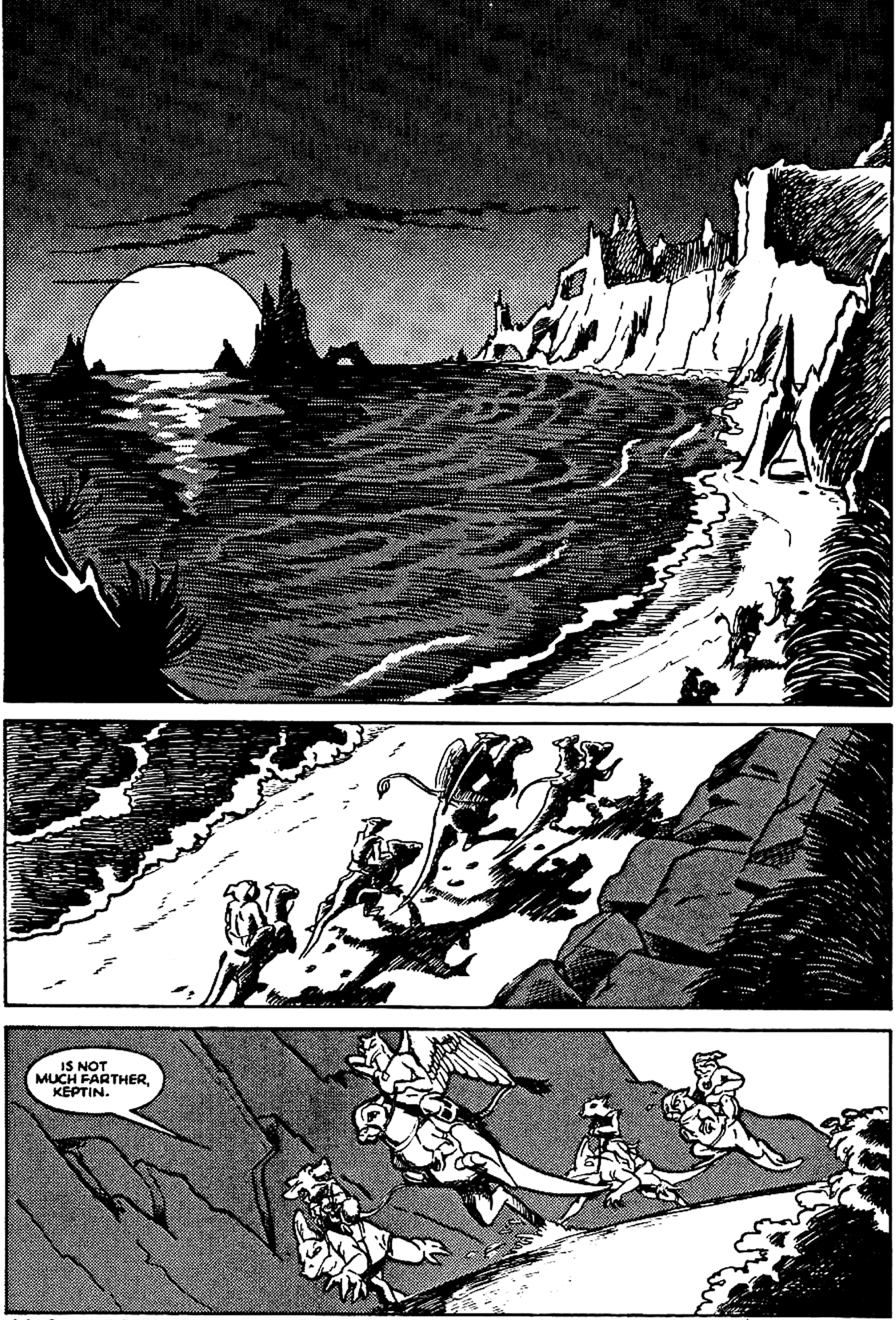
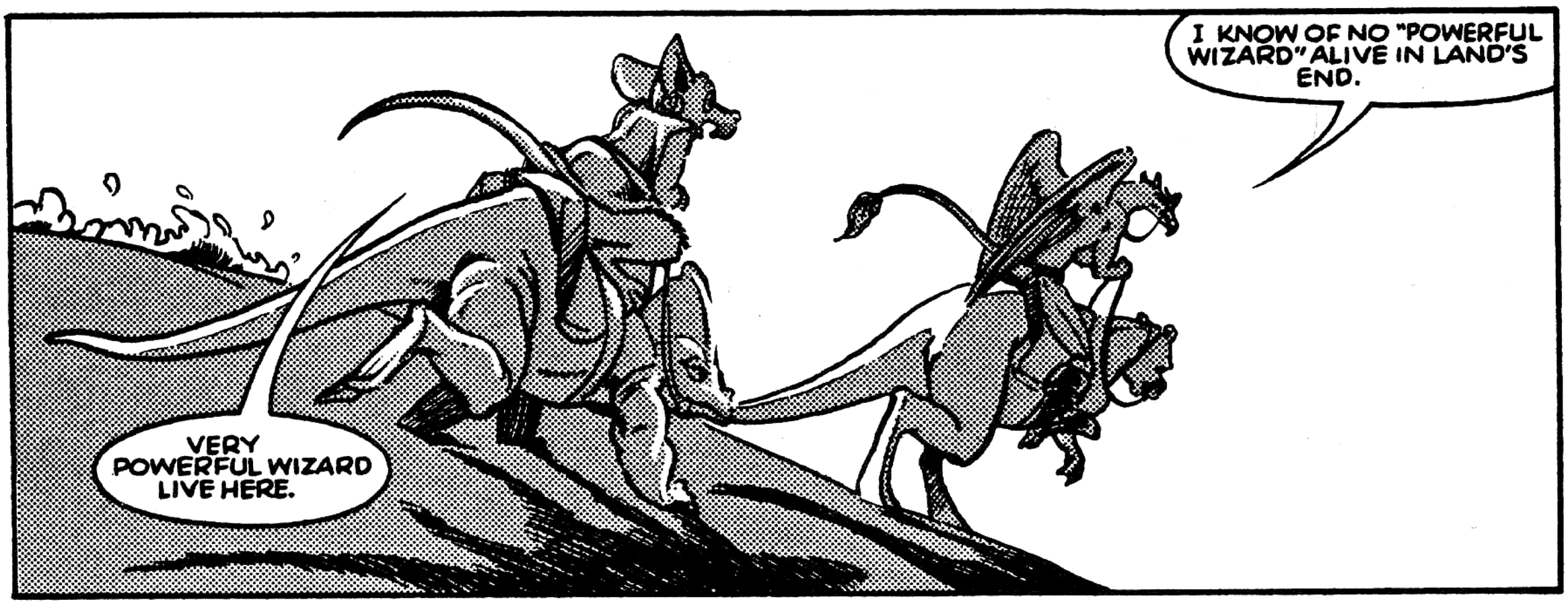


Art & Story - **VICKY WYMAN** Lettering - **NEKO CHAN** Cover Colorist - **BUD TUBY** Editor - **AXEL SHAIKMAN**

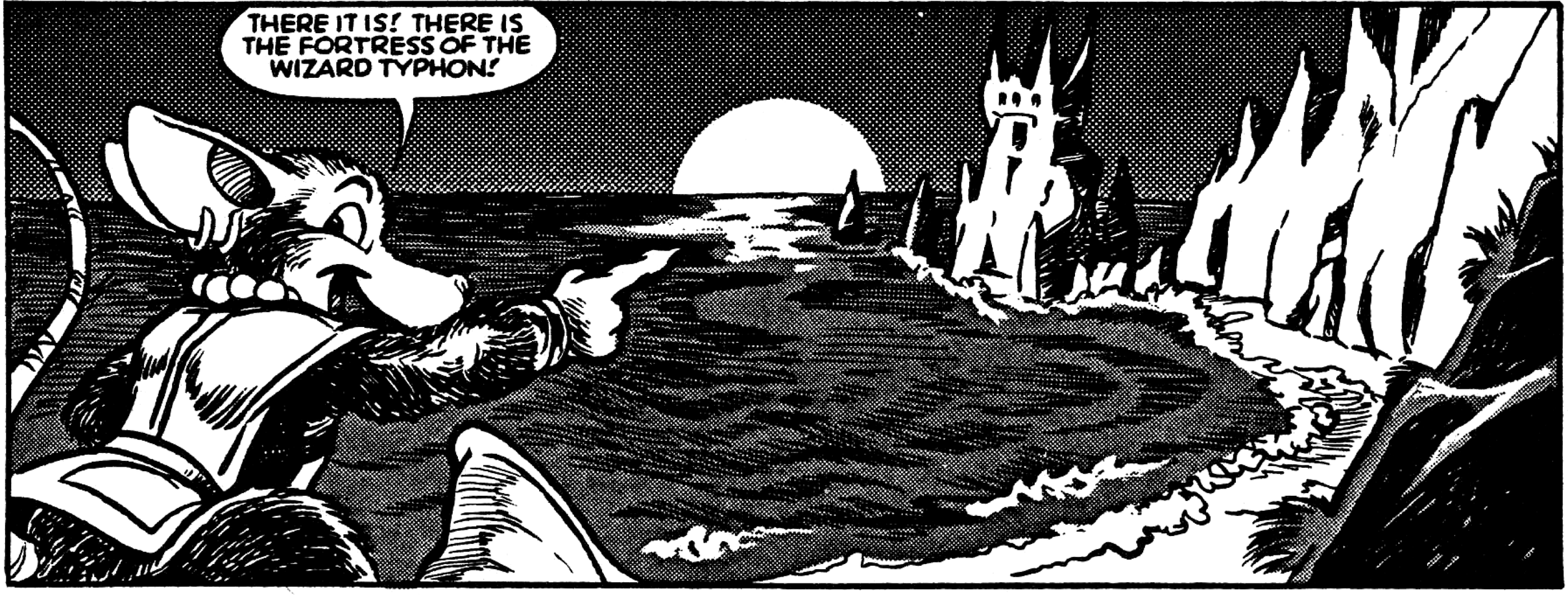
THEY CALL THIS PLACE LAND'S END.
BEFORE ALLYNRUD'S TIME, PEOPLE THOUGHT THIS WAS THE END OF THE WORLD.

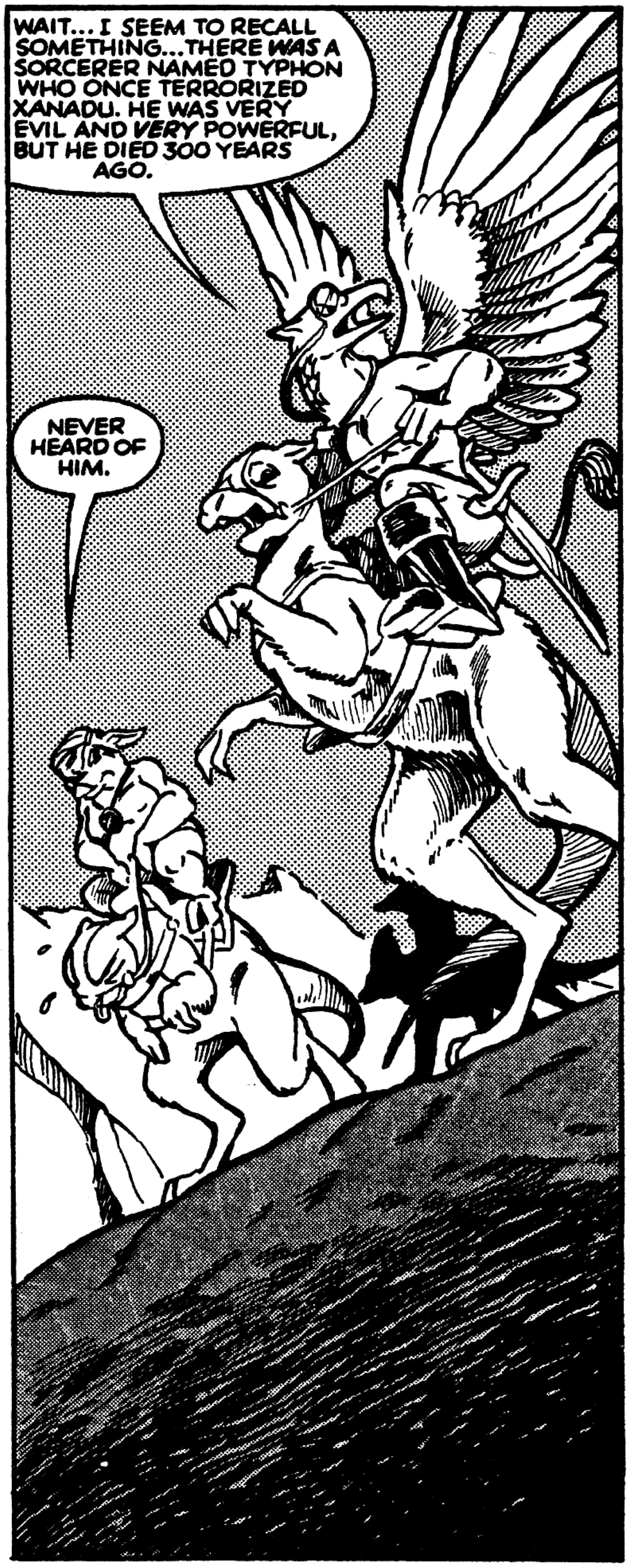
THERE'S NOTHING HERE, SCRATCH.
WHY DID YOU BRING ME TO THIS PLACE?

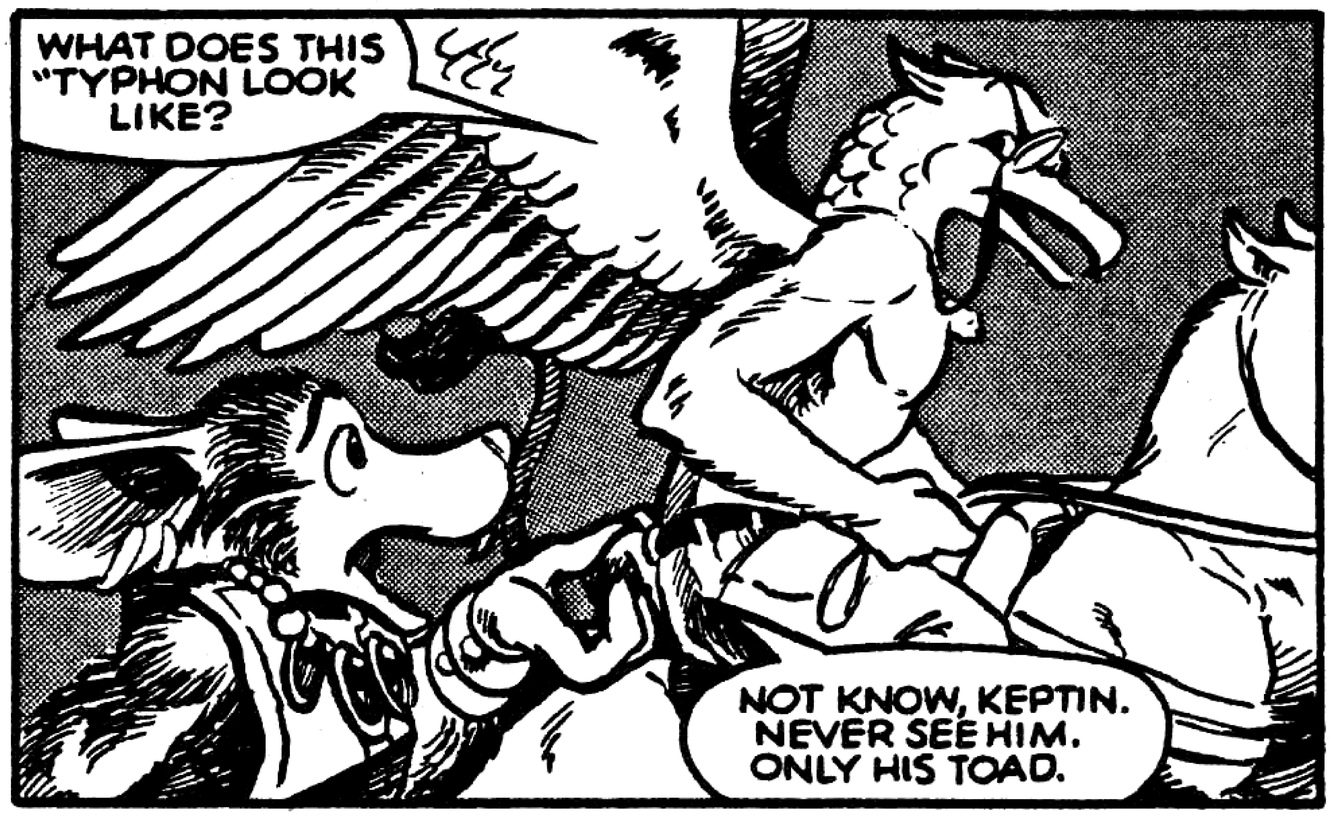

I KNOW OF NO "POWERFUL WIZARD" ALIVE IN LAND'S END.
VERY POWERFUL WIZARD LIVE HERE.

YEAH! IF HE'S SO POWERFUL, WHAT'S HE DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?
MEBBE HE LIKE IT HERE! IF YOU NO BELIEVE ME, ASK KVETCH. KVETCH GOT BASILISK VENOM FROM HIM.

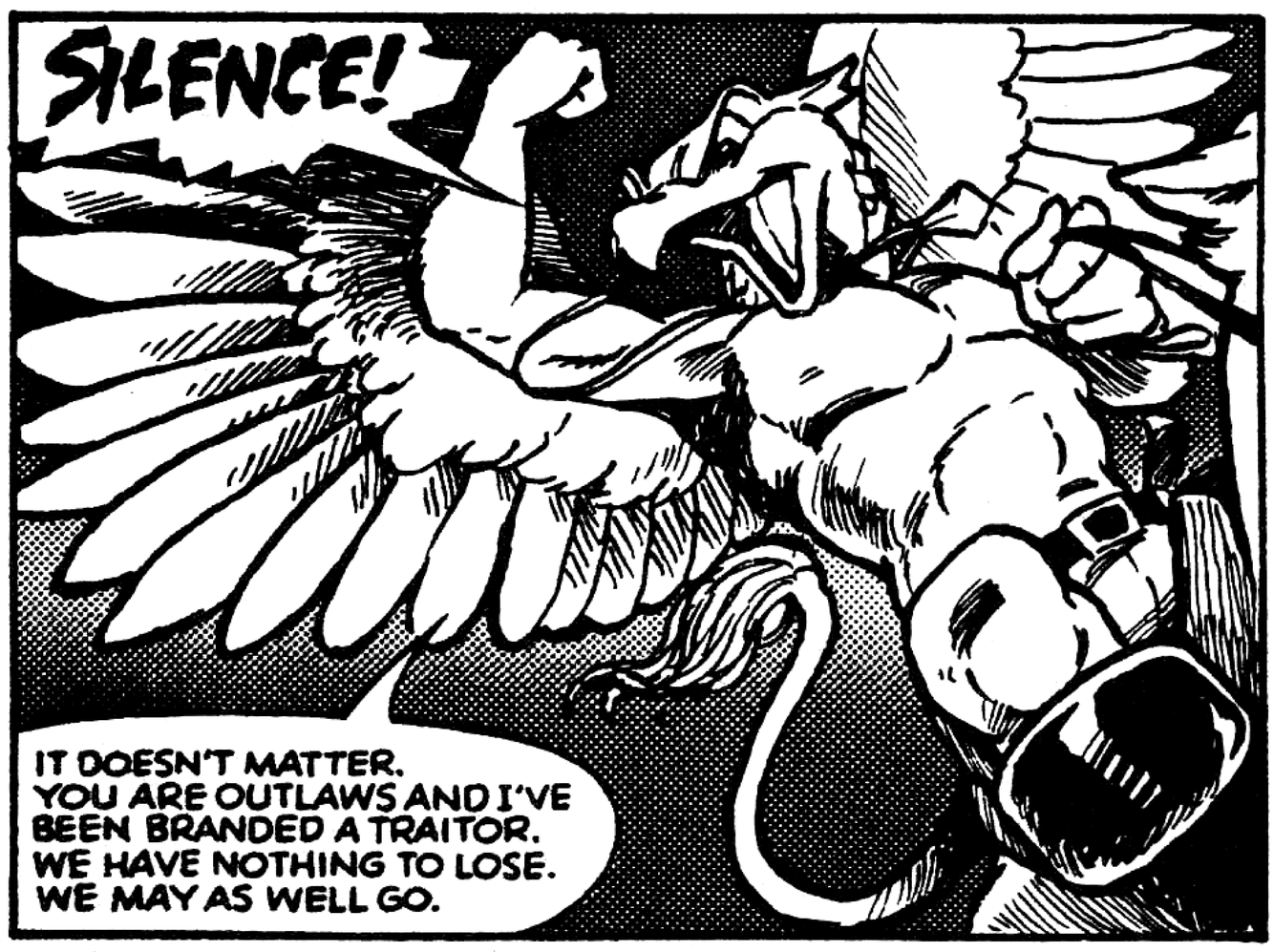
I KNOW HE'S OUT HERE, BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM.
I'VE ONLY SEEN HIS TOAD ASSISTANT... AND THE TOAD NEVER SAYS A WORD.

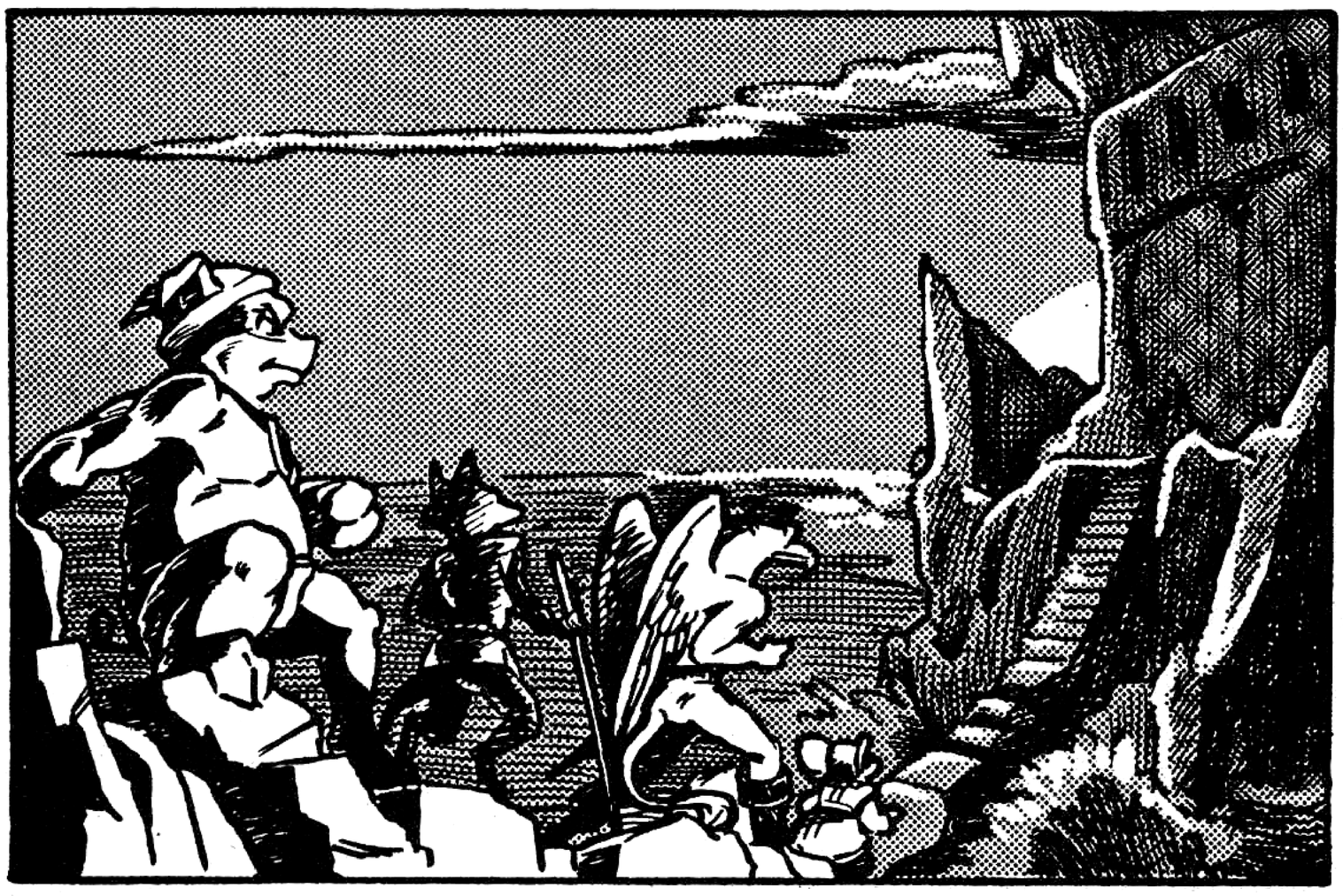

THERE IT IS! THERE IS THE FORTRESS OF THE WIZARD TYPHON!


WAIT... I SEEM TO RECALL SOMETHING...THERE WAS A SORCERER NAMED TYPHON WHO ONCE TERRORIZED XANADU. HE WAS VERY EVIL AND VERY POWERFUL, BUT HE DIED 300 YEARS AGO.
NEVER HEARD OF HIM.


WHAT DOES THIS "TYPHON LOOK LIKE?
NOT KNOW, KEPTIN. NEVER SEE HIM. ONLY HIS TOAD.

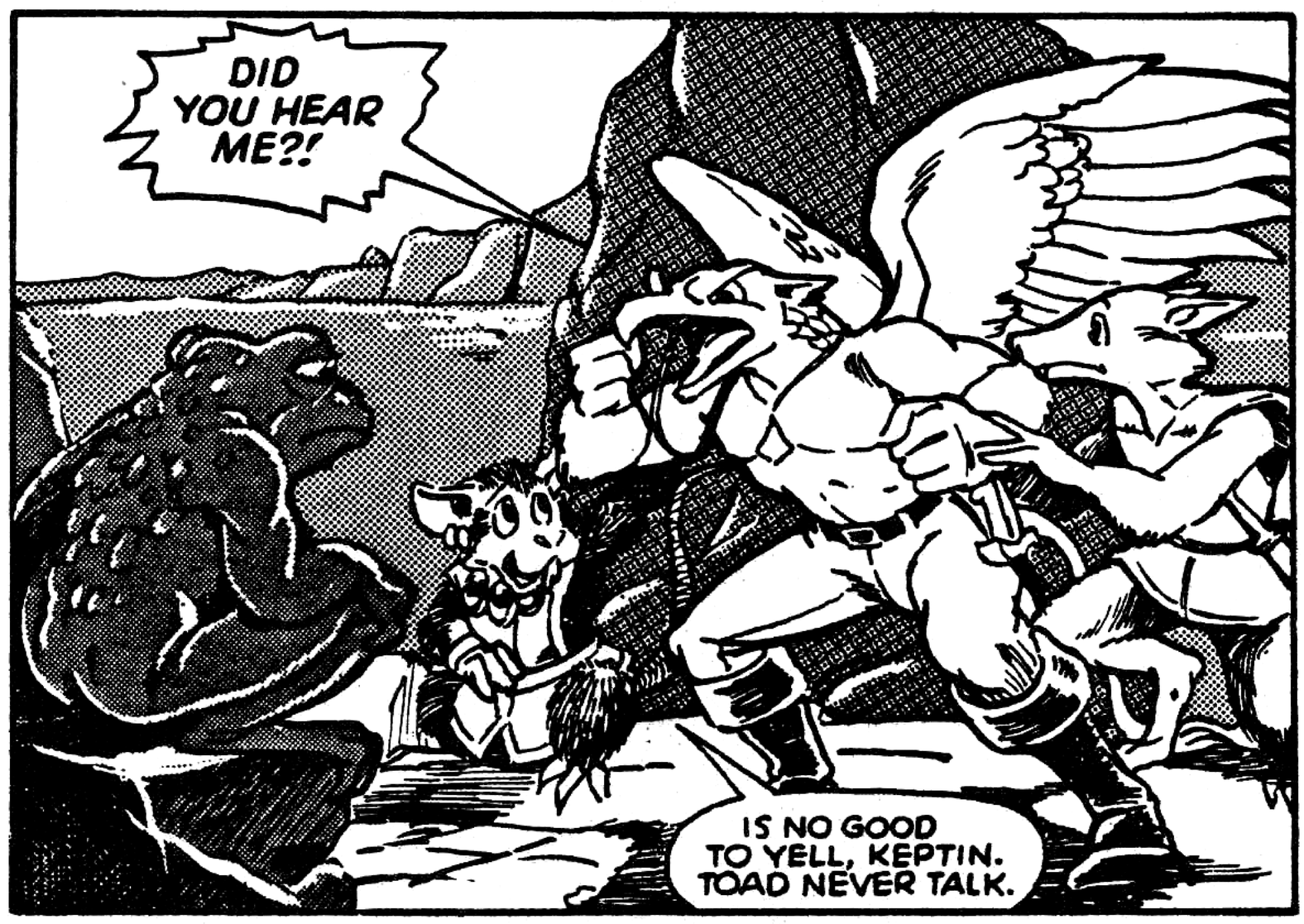
THEN WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE WIZARD'S STILL LIVING HERE?

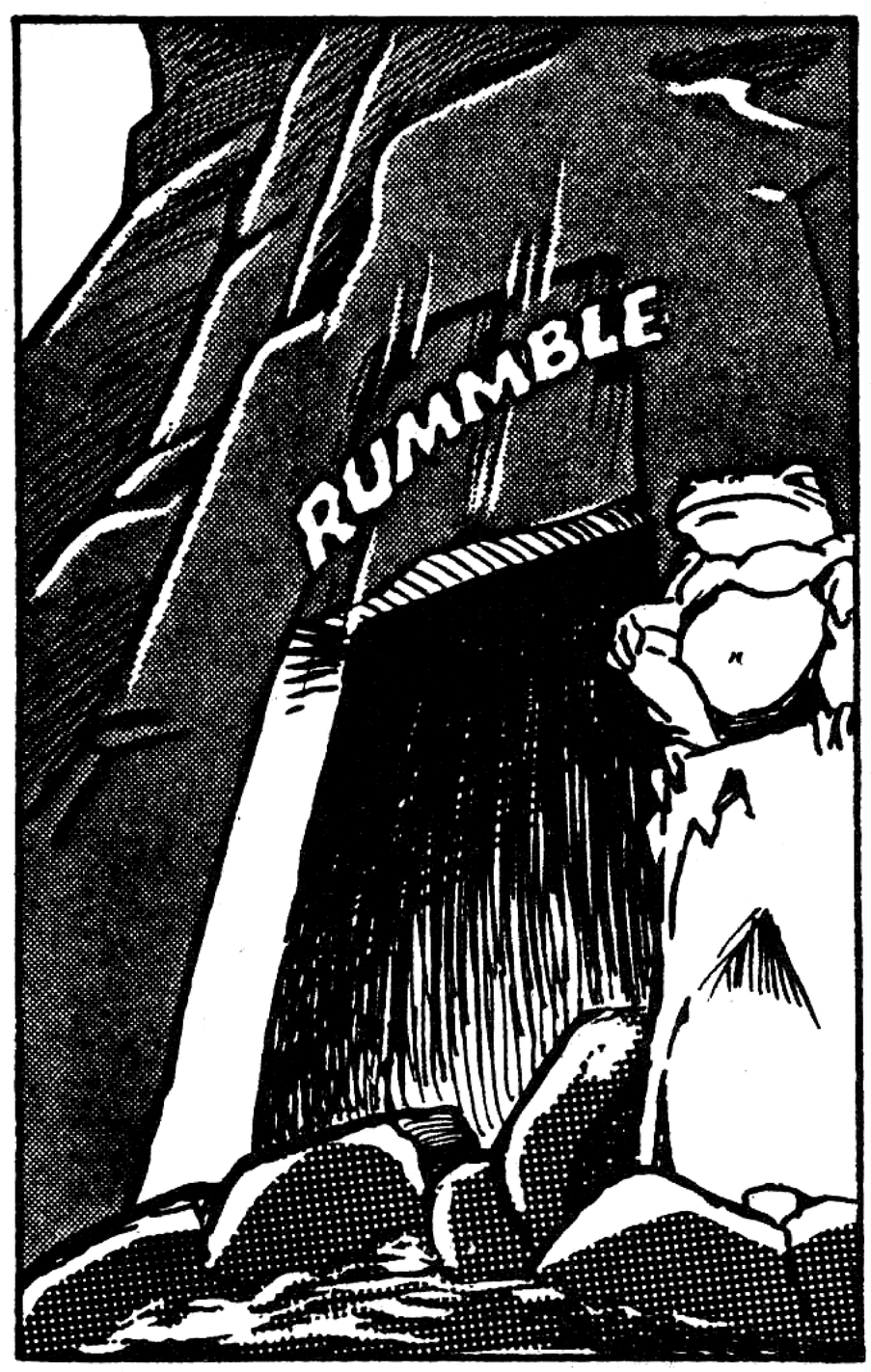

SILENCE!
IT DOESN'T MATTER. YOU ARE OUTLAWS AND I'VE BEEN BRANDED A TRAITOR. WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE. WE MAY AS WELL GO.



!

WE HAVE COME TO SEE TYPHON. TAKE US TO YOUR MASTER.

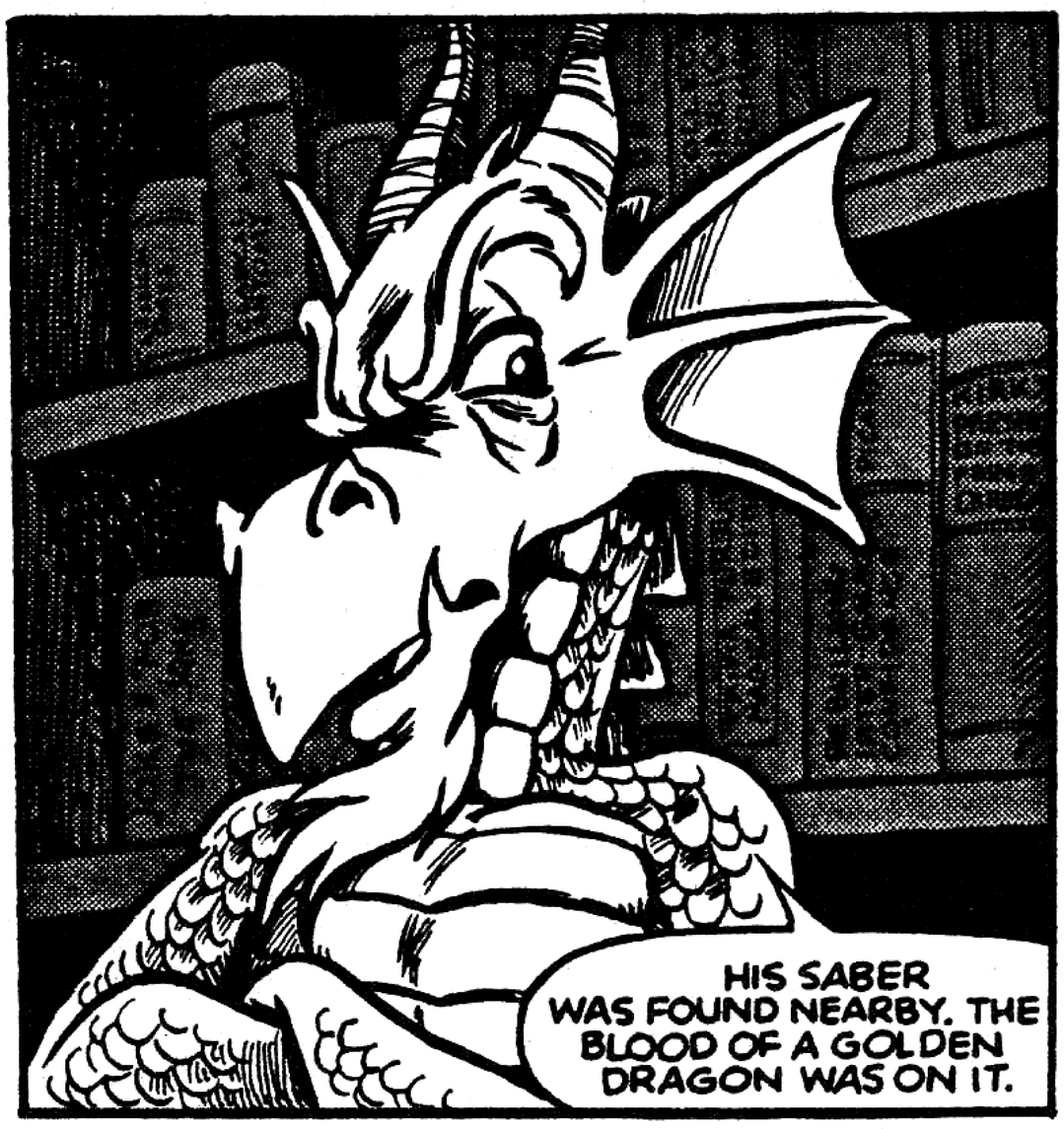

DID YOU HEAR ME?!
IS NO GOOD TO YELL, KEPTIN. TOAD NEVER TALK.


RUMMBLE

Uuh... I THINK MEBBE HE SEE US...
GOOD. LET'S HURRY BEFORE HE CHANGES HIS MIND.

THIS IS FIREPETAL'S. KINOMON GAVE IT TO HER AS A TOKEN OF THEIR BETROTHAL. IF SHE ALLOWED IT TO BE TAKEN FROM HER, THEN SHE IS DEAD.

ARE YOU SURE?
YES... AS I AM EQUALLY CERTAIN THAT REGINALD PLUME KILLED HER.

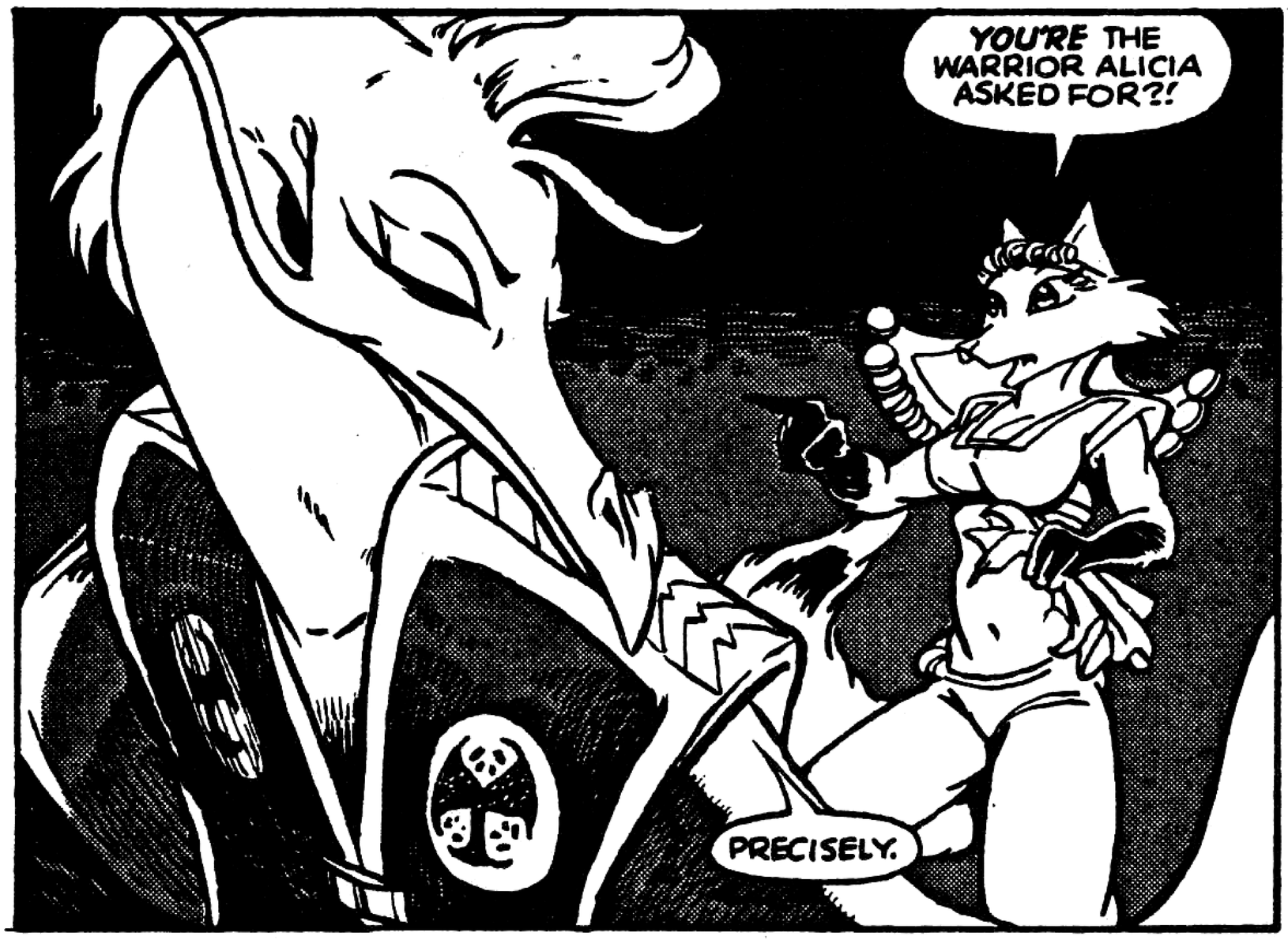

HIS SABER WAS FOUND NEARBY. THE BLOOD OF A GOLDEN DRAGON WAS ON IT.

PERHAPS SHE'S ONLY WOUNDED. YOU FOUND NO BODY.

KINOMON REMOVED THE BODY, OF COURSE, THAT WAS HIS RIGHT AS HER BETROTHED.
YOU KNOW KINOMON'S ALIVE?!

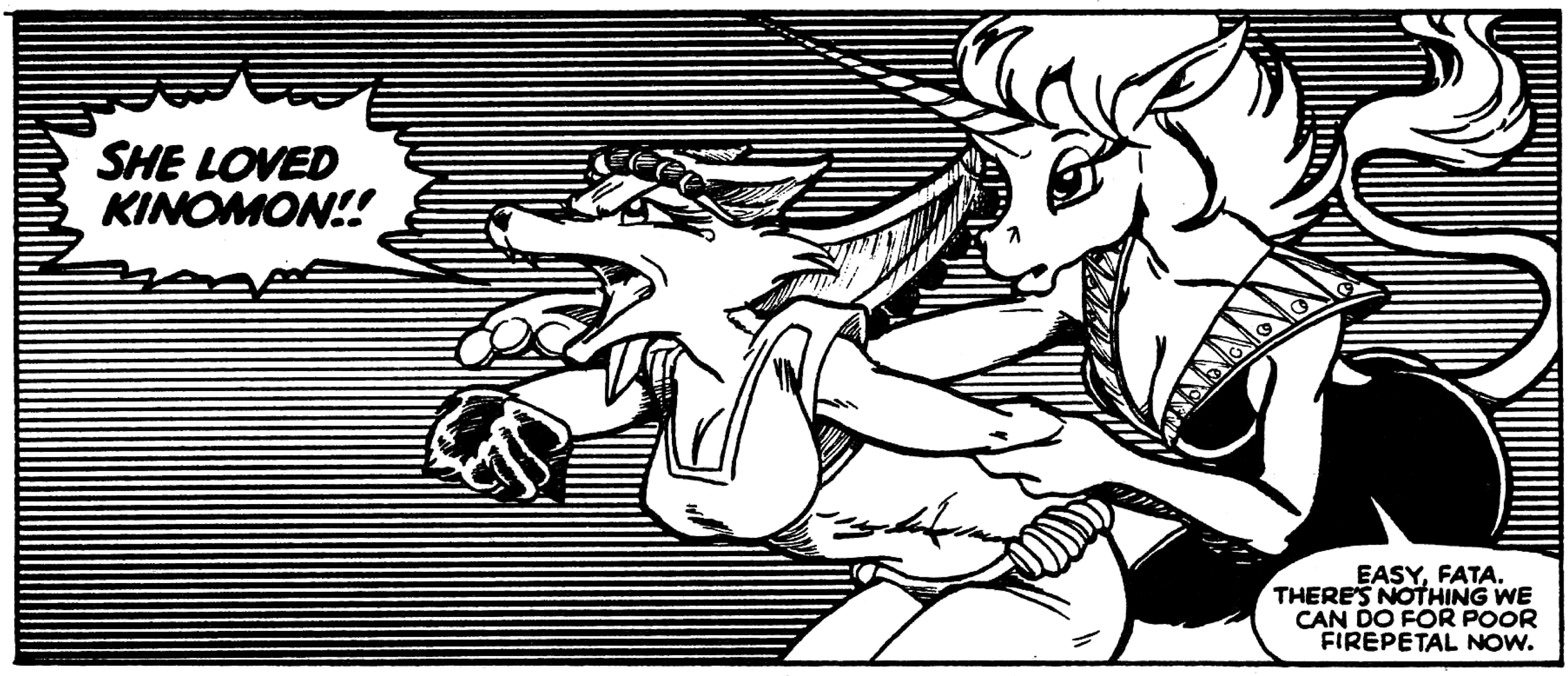
OF COURSE, LADY FATIMA. JUST AS YOU DO.
I ALSO KNOW HE HAS TAKEN REFUGE WITH THE THIEF TABBE le FAUVE UNTIL HE'S STRONG ENOUGH TO AVENGE HIS HONOR. I NEVER DOUBTED KINOMON WOULD SURVIVE HIS ORDEAL. LADY FIREPETAL WAS THE PROBLEM. TO HER, LOVE WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE GOLDEN WAY.

WHAT IS "THE GOLDEN WAY"?
"THE GOLDEN WAY IS TOTAL DUTY AND TOTAL OBEDIENCE TO THE GOLDEN THRONE, AND TO THE EMPIRE OF XANADU, OF WHICH IT IS A PART.
"FROM THE MOMENT THEY ARE HATCHED, A WARRIOR IS TAUGHT THAT DUTY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN LIFE!
"THE GOLDEN ROAD IS A HARD PATH TO TRAVEL, YET IT IS THE WARRIOR'S WAY."
MY BROTHER IS A WARRIOR. HE WOULD UNDERSTAND.
"UNDERSTAND" WHAT?
THAT HE WAS A CATSPAW, LADY! THAT HE WAS BAIT!
WHEN THE EMPRESS TOLD OUR GOLDEN MOTHER THAT SHE SUSPECTED THERE WAS A TRAITOR IN HER HOUSEHOLD, JOO-SAMA'S FIRST INSTINCT WAS TO SEND THE FINEST WARRIOR SHE HAD. YET, THE PRESENCE OF A GREAT WARRIOR MIGHT DRIVE THE TRAITOR INTO HIDING. IT WAS DECIDED TO SEND A LESSER WARRIOR, WHO WOULD PROVIDE A MORE INVITING TARGET, AND TO ASSIGN THE REAL EMISSARY A LESS THREATENING ROLE.


YOU'RE THE WARRIOR ALICIA ASKED FOR?!
PRECISELY.

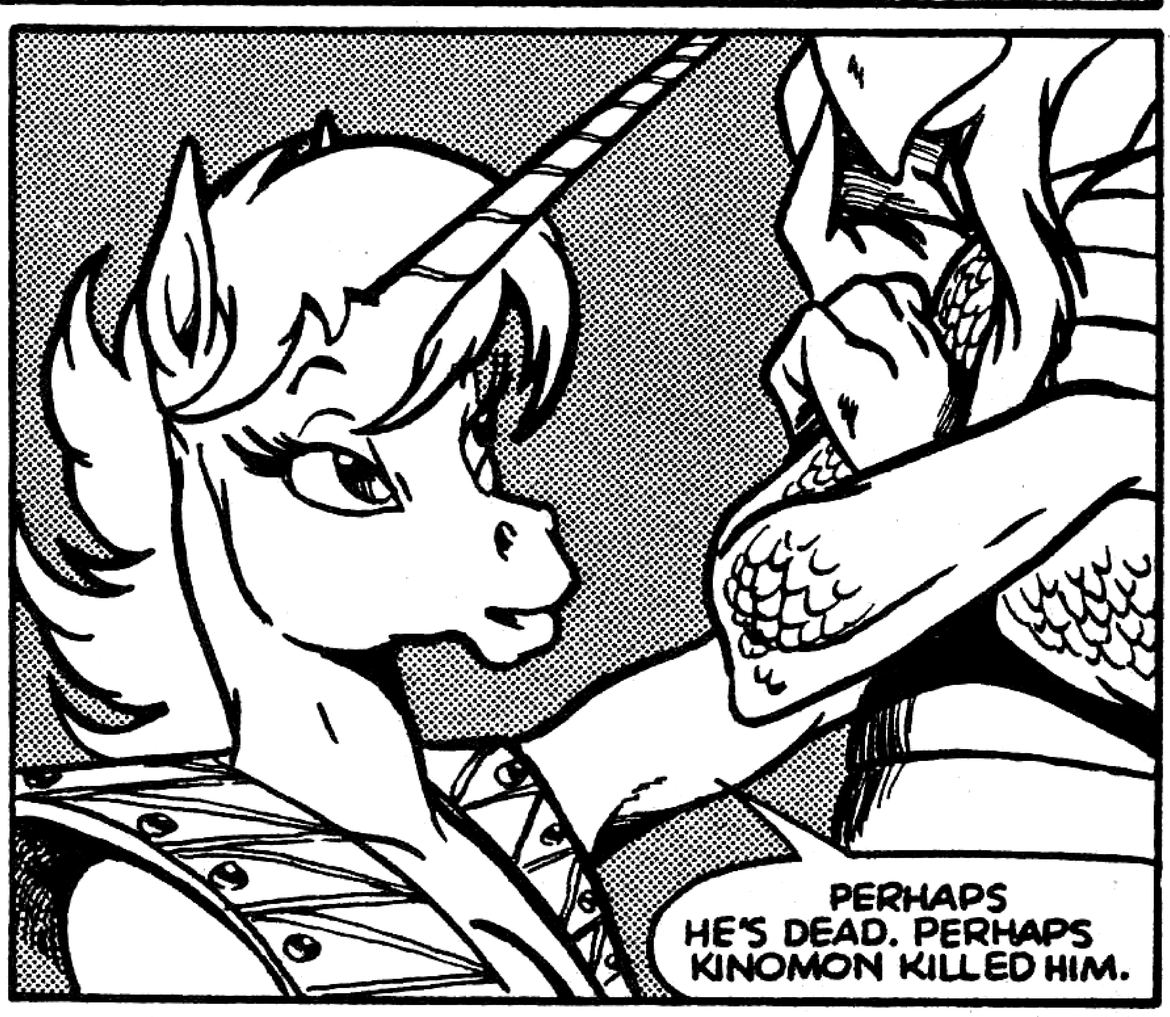
YOU USED YOUR OWN BROTHER LIKE THAT?!!

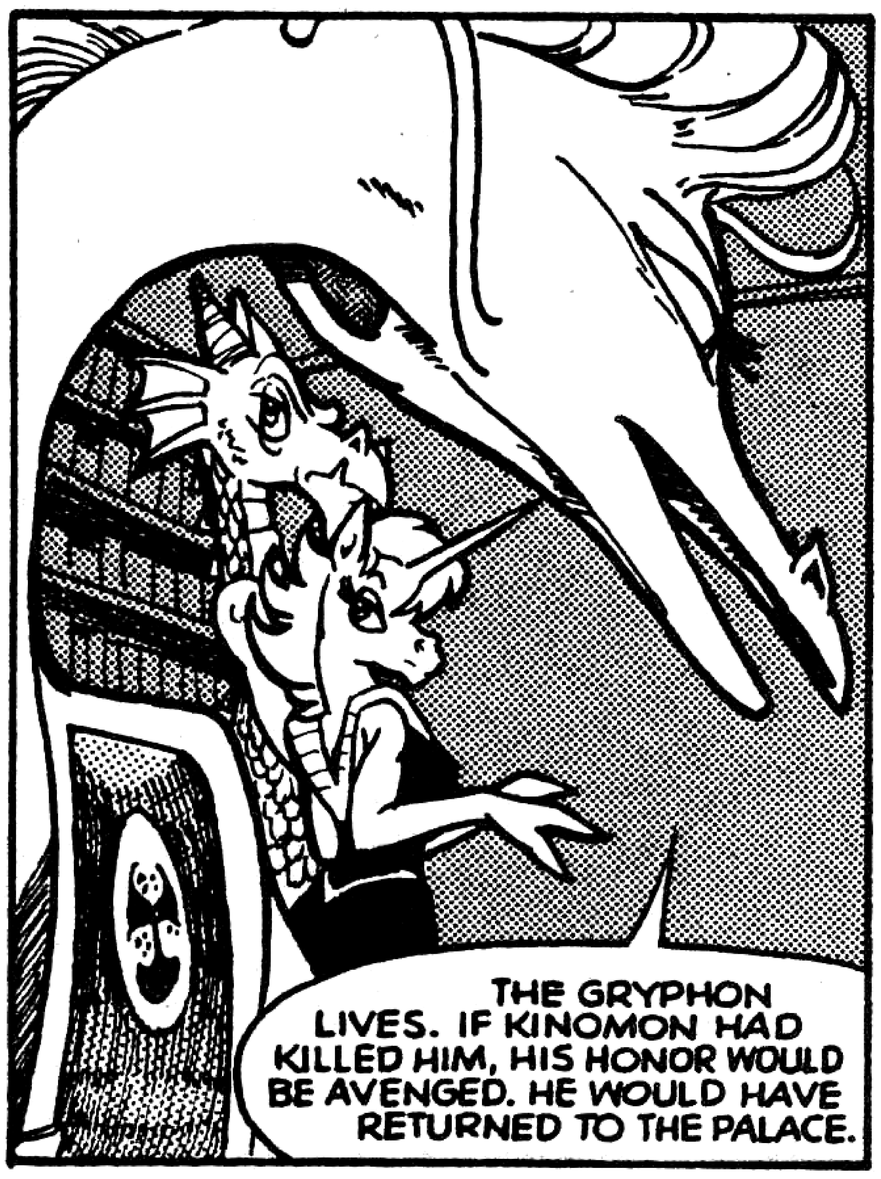
OF COURSE. HE'S A WARRIOR.
SO AM I. WE EXIST TO SERVE. I HAD HOPED FOR BETTER FROM FIREPETAL. HER BEHAVIOR WAS IMPULSIVE AND MAY HAVE COMPROMISED US ALL.

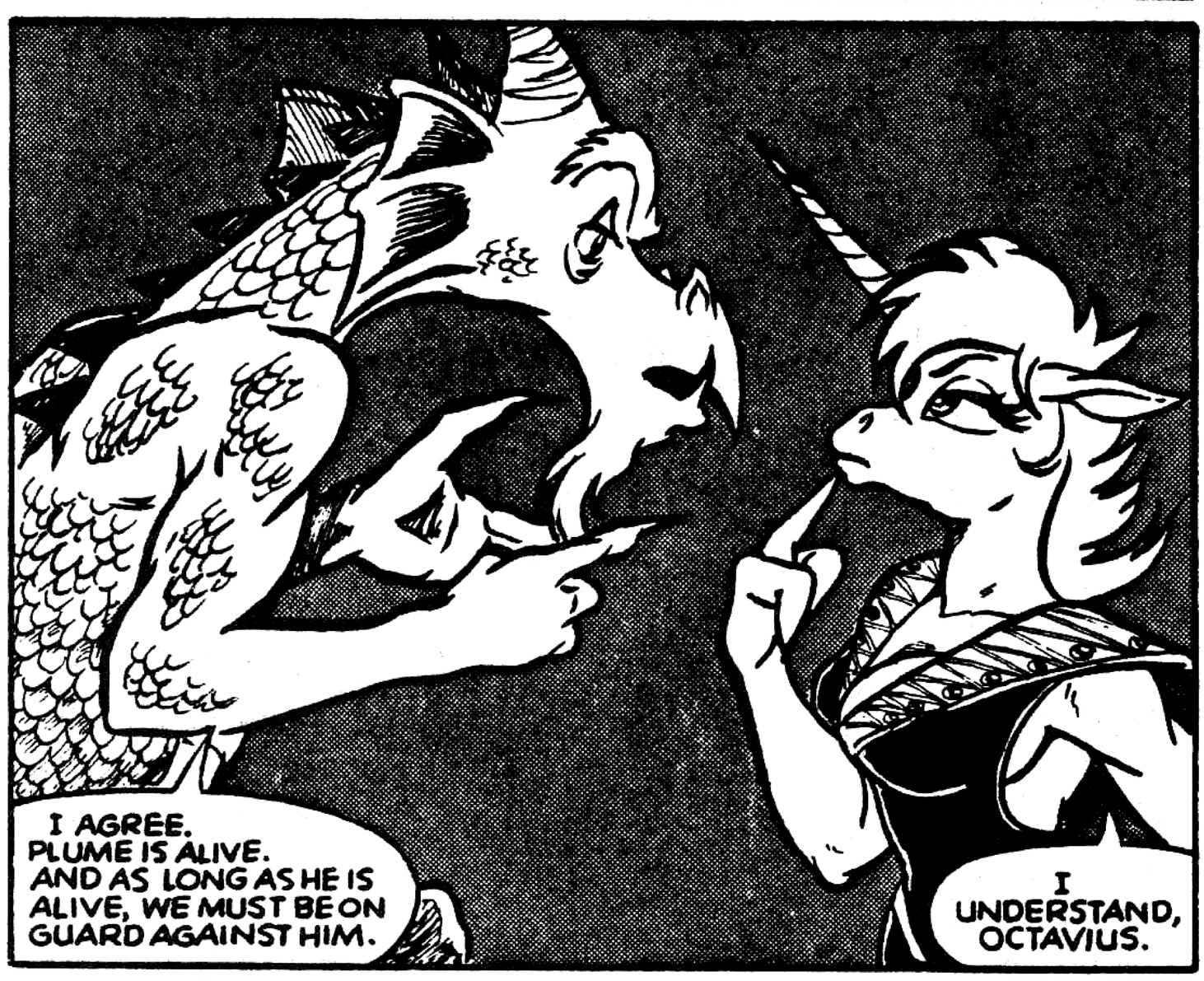

SHE LOVED KINOMON!!
EASY, FATA. THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO FOR POOR FIREPETAL NOW.

PRINCESS KAJIKO, IF YOU ARE THE WARRIOR I ASKED FOR, THEN I WELCOME YOUR ASSISTANCE.

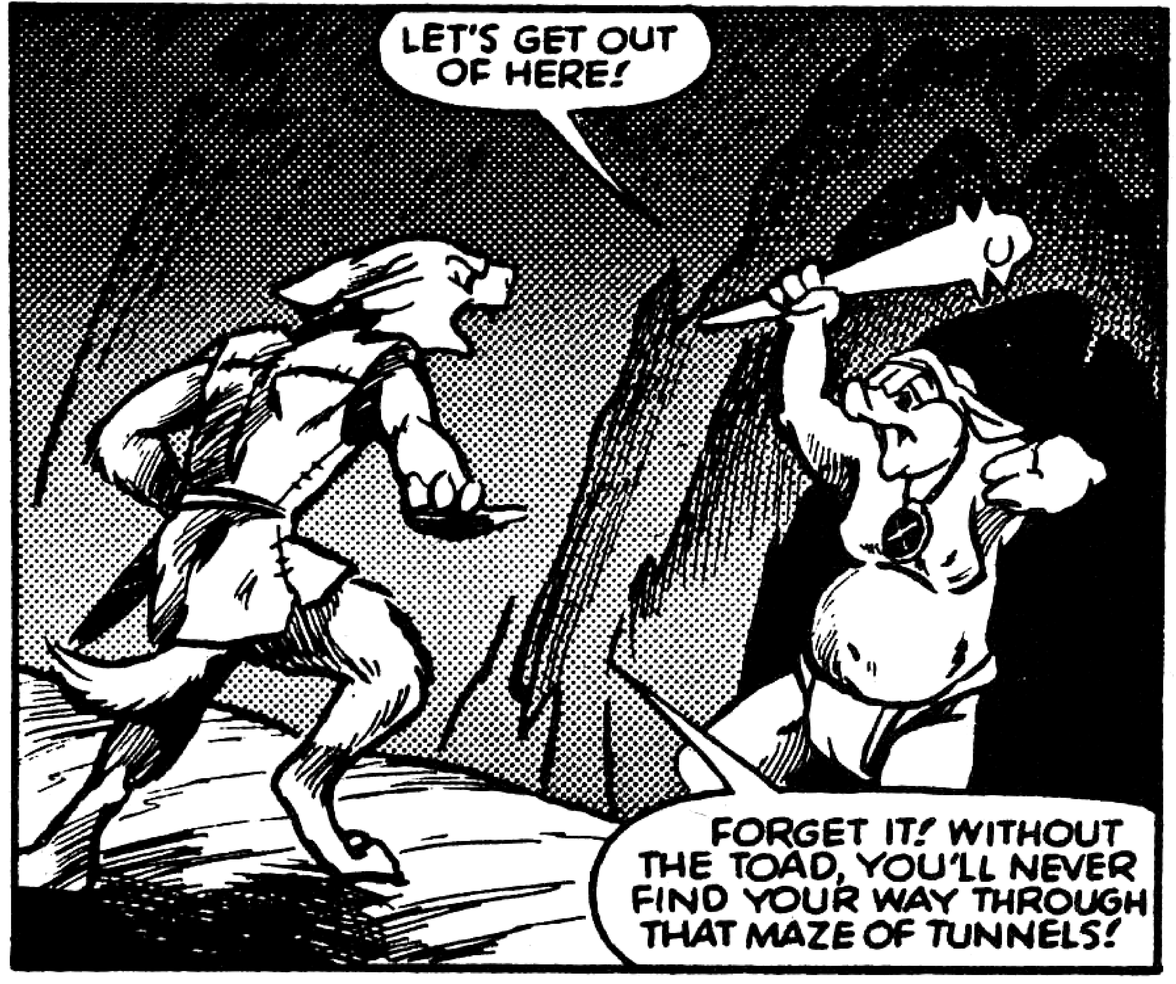
HOWEVER, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO. CAPTAIN PLUME HAS FLED THE PALACE. ONCE WORD OF FIREPETAL'S MURDER SPREADS, HE'LL LOSE THE SUPPORT OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD. HE'S DISGRACED AND ALONE. THERE IS NOTHING HE CAN DO.





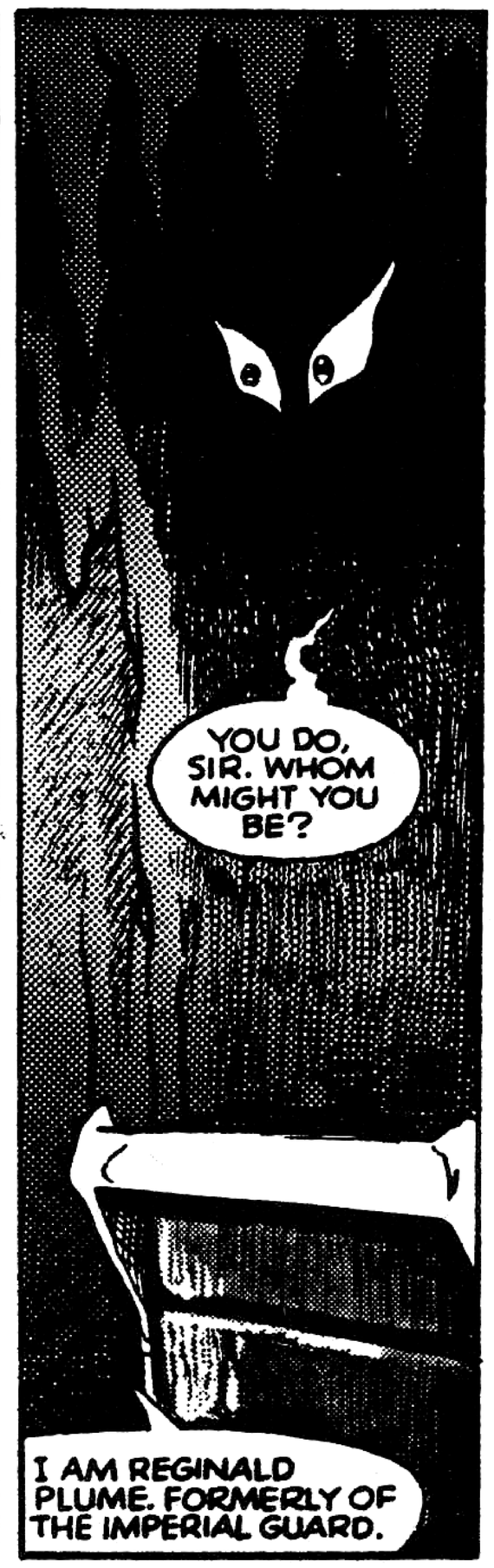


I DON'T LIKE THIS PLACE, BOSS.
AW SHUT UP! YOU'RE SCARED, YOU SHOULD'VE STAYED OUTSIDE!
ALONE...?
IS YOUR MASTER HERE?
WHAT ROOM IS THIS, SCRATCH?
NOT KNOW, KEPTIN. NEVER BEEN INSIDE BEFORE.

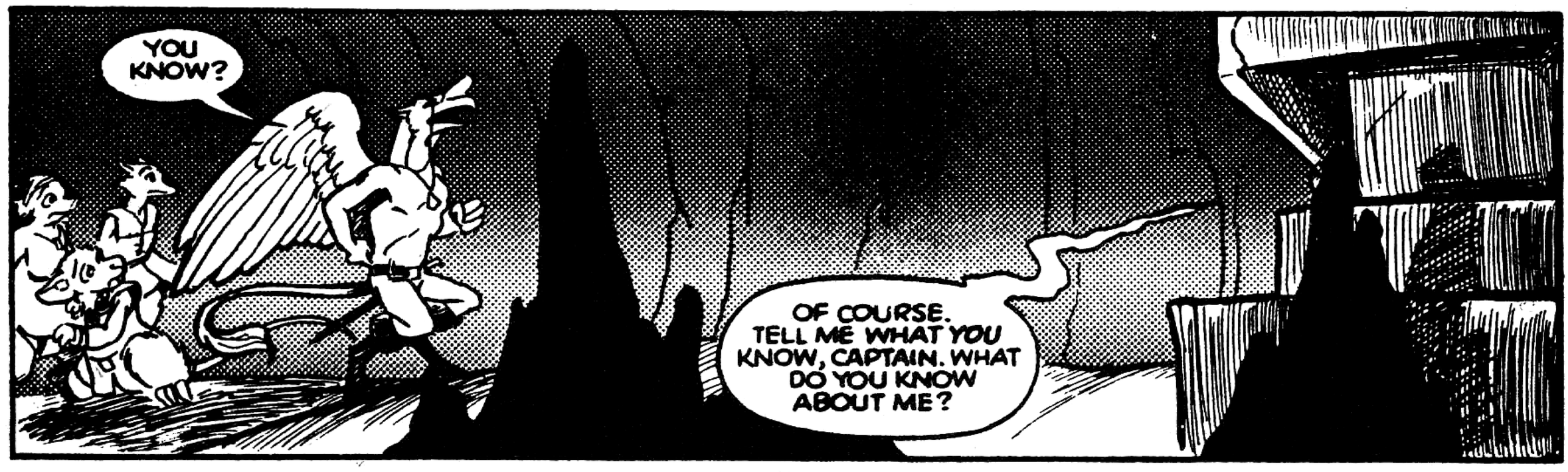

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
FORGET IT! WITHOUT THE TOAD, YOU'LL NEVER FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH THAT MAZE OF TUNNELS!

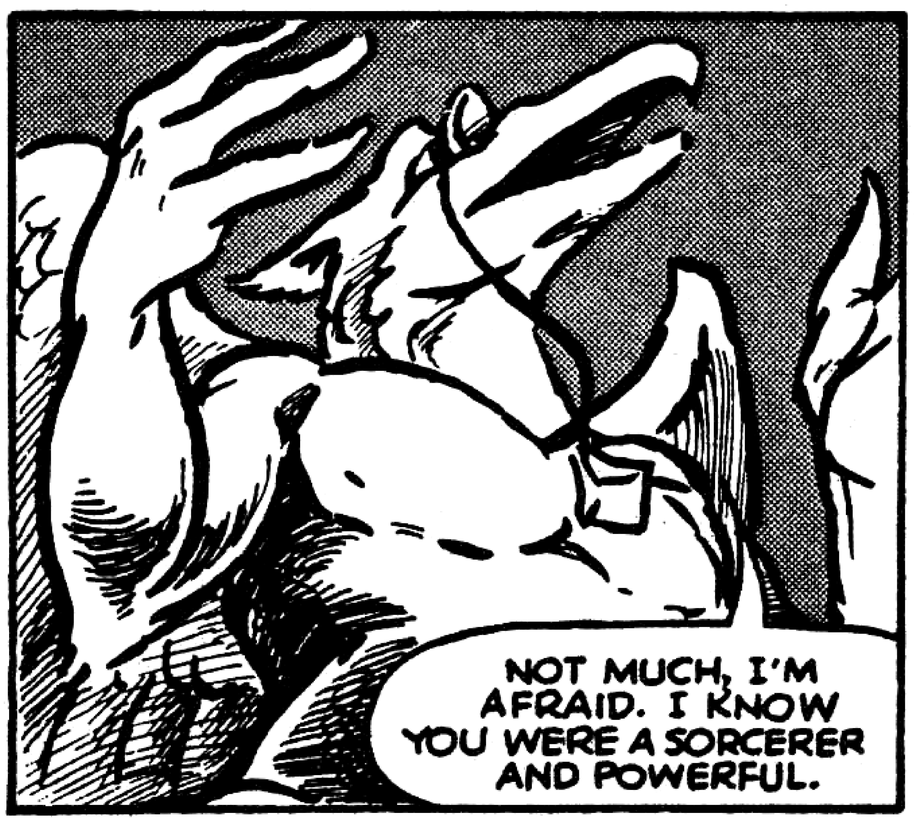
TOAD...?
HE'S GONE!

HAVE I THE HONOR OF ADDRESSING SORCERER TYPHON?

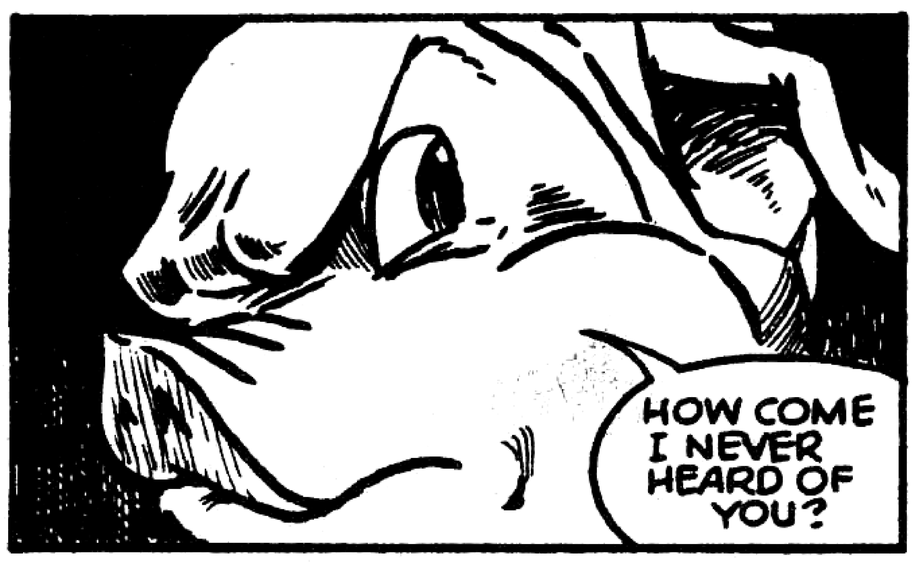

YOU DO, SIR. WHOM MIGHT YOU BE?
I AM REGINALD PLUME. FORMERLY OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD.

"FORMERLY..."? DID OUR LITTLE EMPRESS DISMISS YOU?
WE HAD A MINOR DISAGREEMENT...
I HARDLY THINK THE KIDNAP AND MURDER OF IMPERIAL GUESTS IS A "MINOR DISAGREEMENT", CAPTAIN.

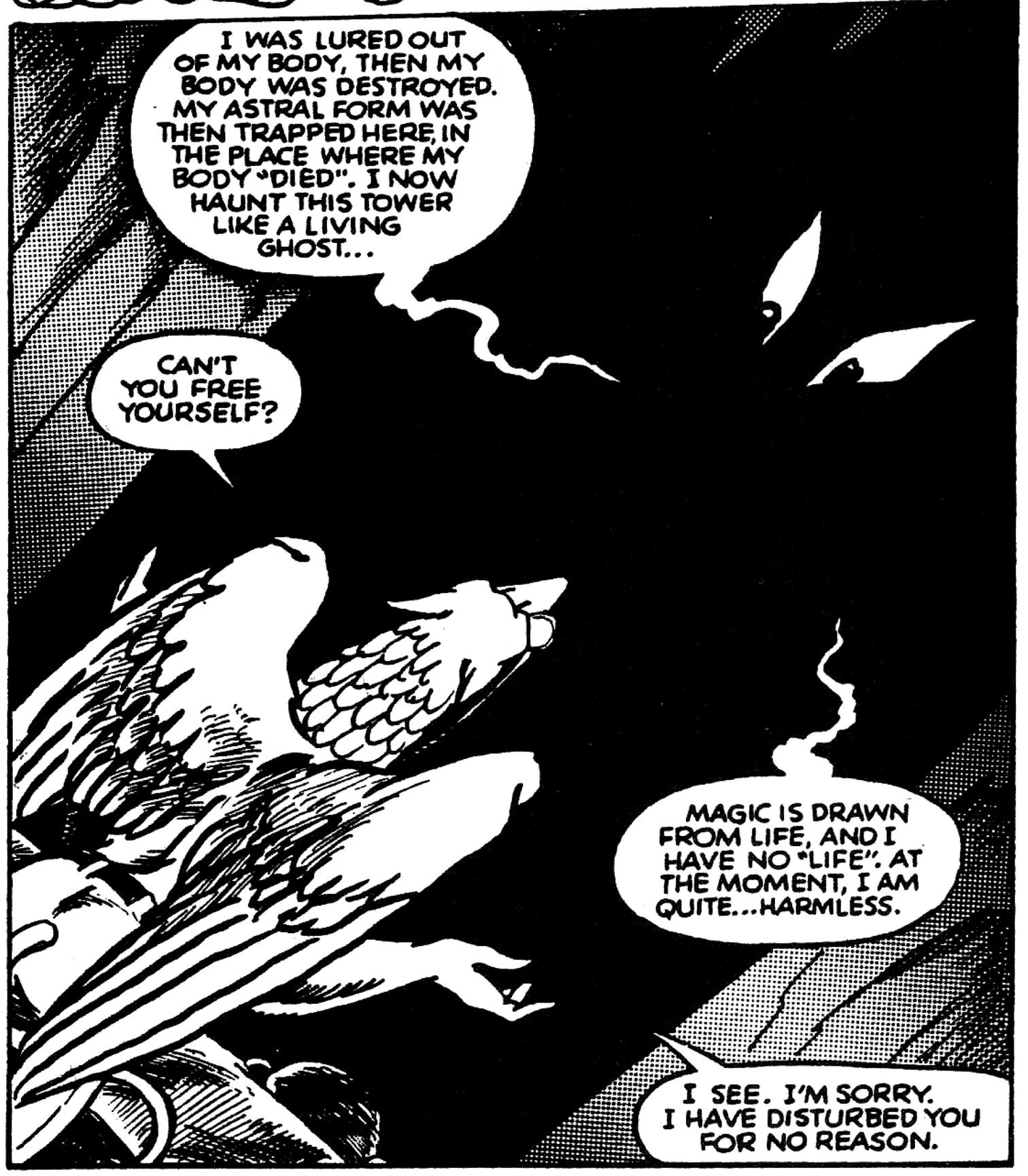

YOU KNOW?
OF COURSE. TELL ME WHAT *YOU* KNOW, CAPTAIN. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME?


NOT MUCH, I'M AFRAID. I KNOW YOU WERE A SORCERER AND POWERFUL.

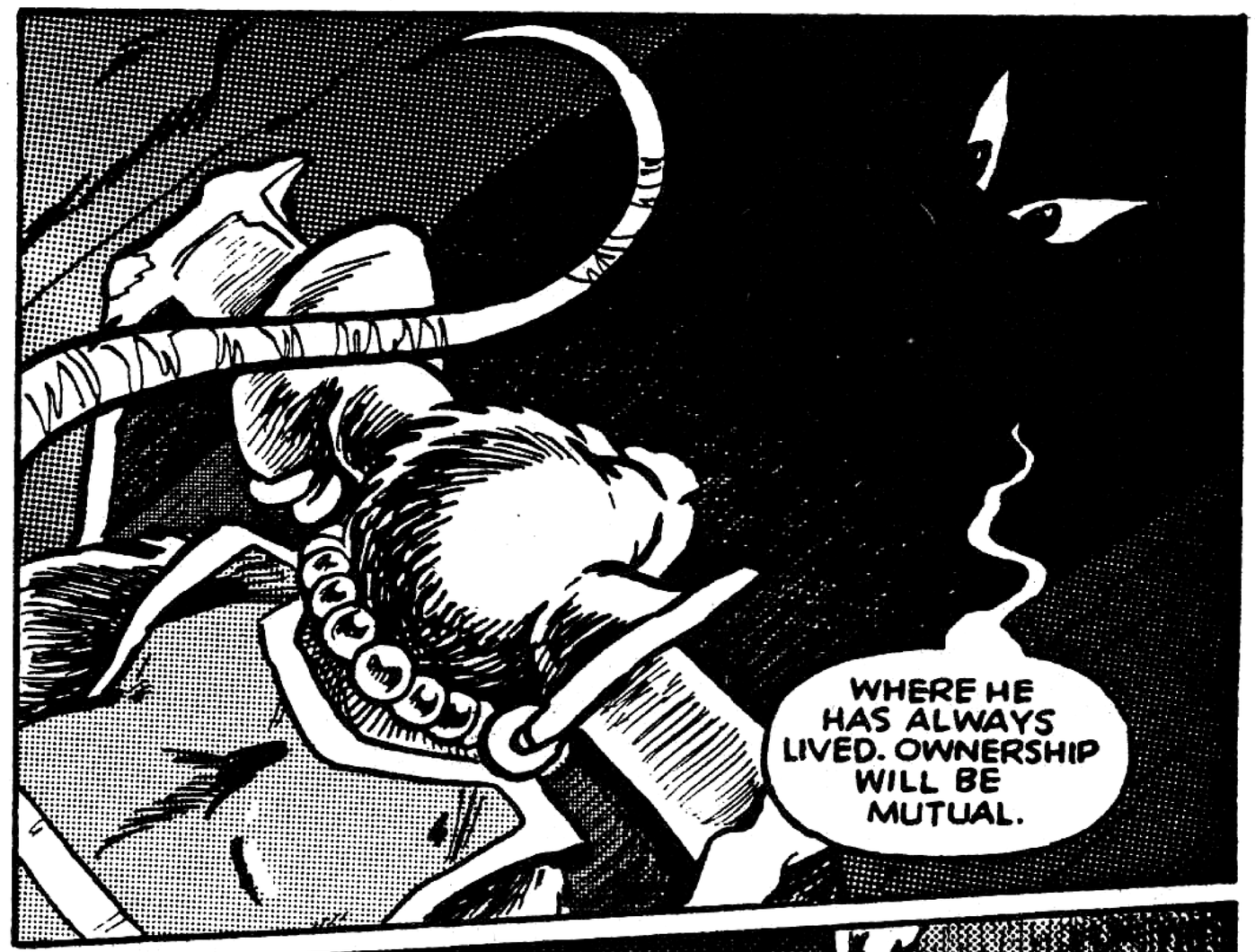
" 'POWERFUL' DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE ME, SIR. ONCE I WAS SO POWERFUL, ALLYNRUD TREMBLED AT THE MENTION OF MY NAME. ONCE MY SHADOW SPREAD SO FAR, IT DARKENED THE DREAMS OF ALLYNRUD."
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA


HOW COME I NEVER HEARD OF YOU?

I WAS THE VICTIM OF A TRICK, SWINE! EVEN THE MOST POWERFUL AMONG US CAN FALL PREY TO TREACHERY! THE CAPTAIN UNDERSTANDS...
WHAT HAPPENED?


I WAS LURED OUT OF MY BODY, THEN MY BODY WAS DESTROYED. MY ASTRAL FORM WAS THEN TRAPPED HERE, IN THE PLACE WHERE MY BODY "DIED". I NOW HAUNT THIS TOWER LIKE A LIVING GHOST...
CAN'T YOU FREE YOURSELF?
MAGIC IS DRAWN FROM LIFE, AND I HAVE NO "LIFE". AT THE MOMENT, I AM QUITE...HARMLESS.
I SEE. I'M SORRY. I HAVE DISTURBED YOU FOR NO REASON.

ON THE CONTRARY, CAPTAIN. I'M VERY GLAD TO SEE YOU. YOU HAVE THE MEANS TO FREE ME.
I DO?
YOU HAVE A BODY. BEFORE I BECAME A SORCERER, I WAS A GRIFFEN JUST LIKE YOURSELF. THE BLOOD OF ANOTHER GRIFFEN WILL FREE ME.
I SUGGEST A PARTNERSHIP, CAPTAIN. YOUR LIFE AND MY MAGIC. TOGETHER, WE WILL BECOME SO POWERFUL, WE CAN ASPIRE TO THE IMPERIAL THRONE ITSELF!

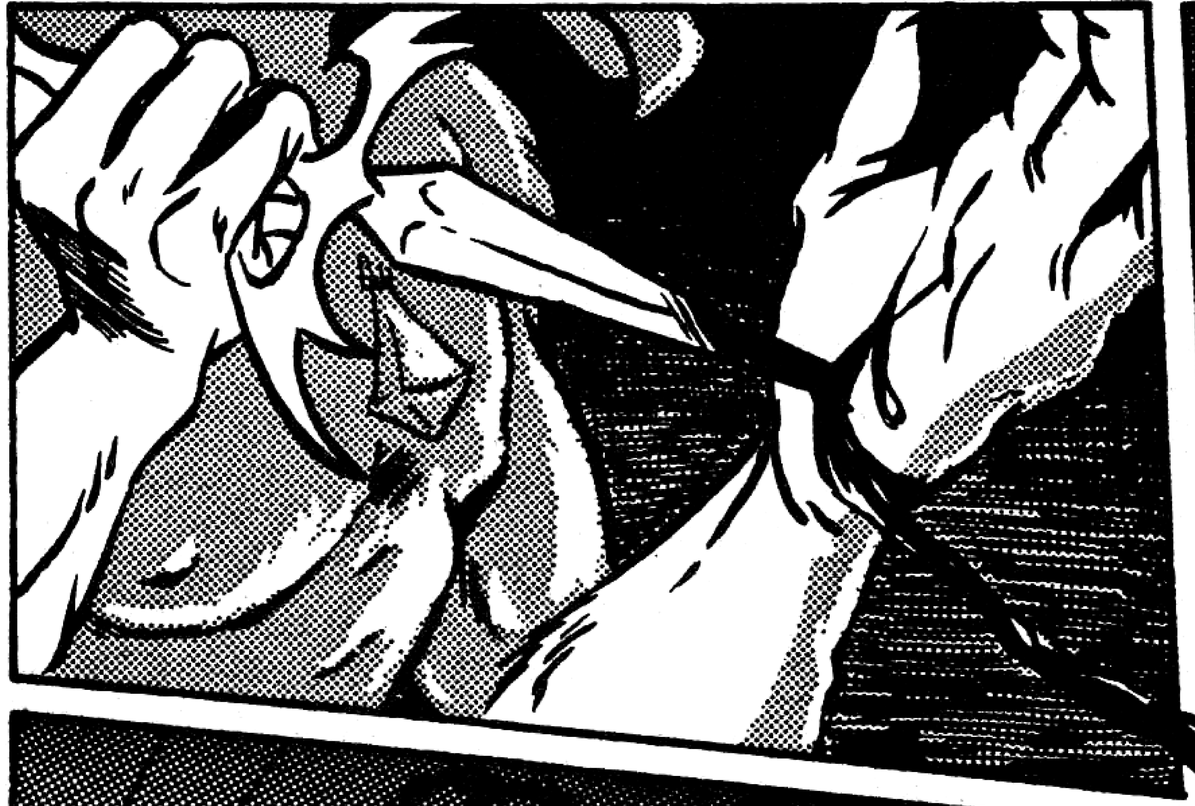


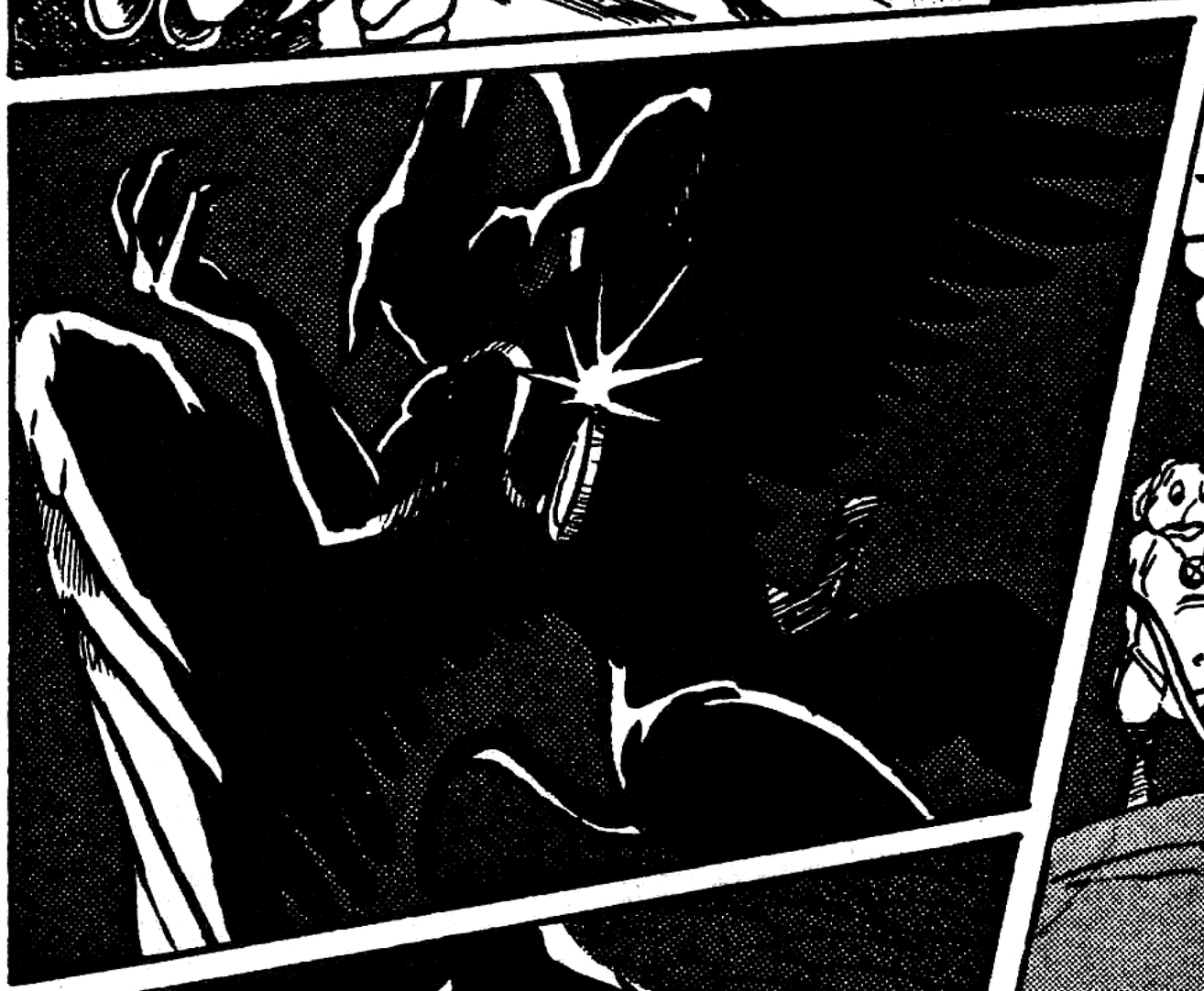
WHAT SAY YOU, CAPTAIN?

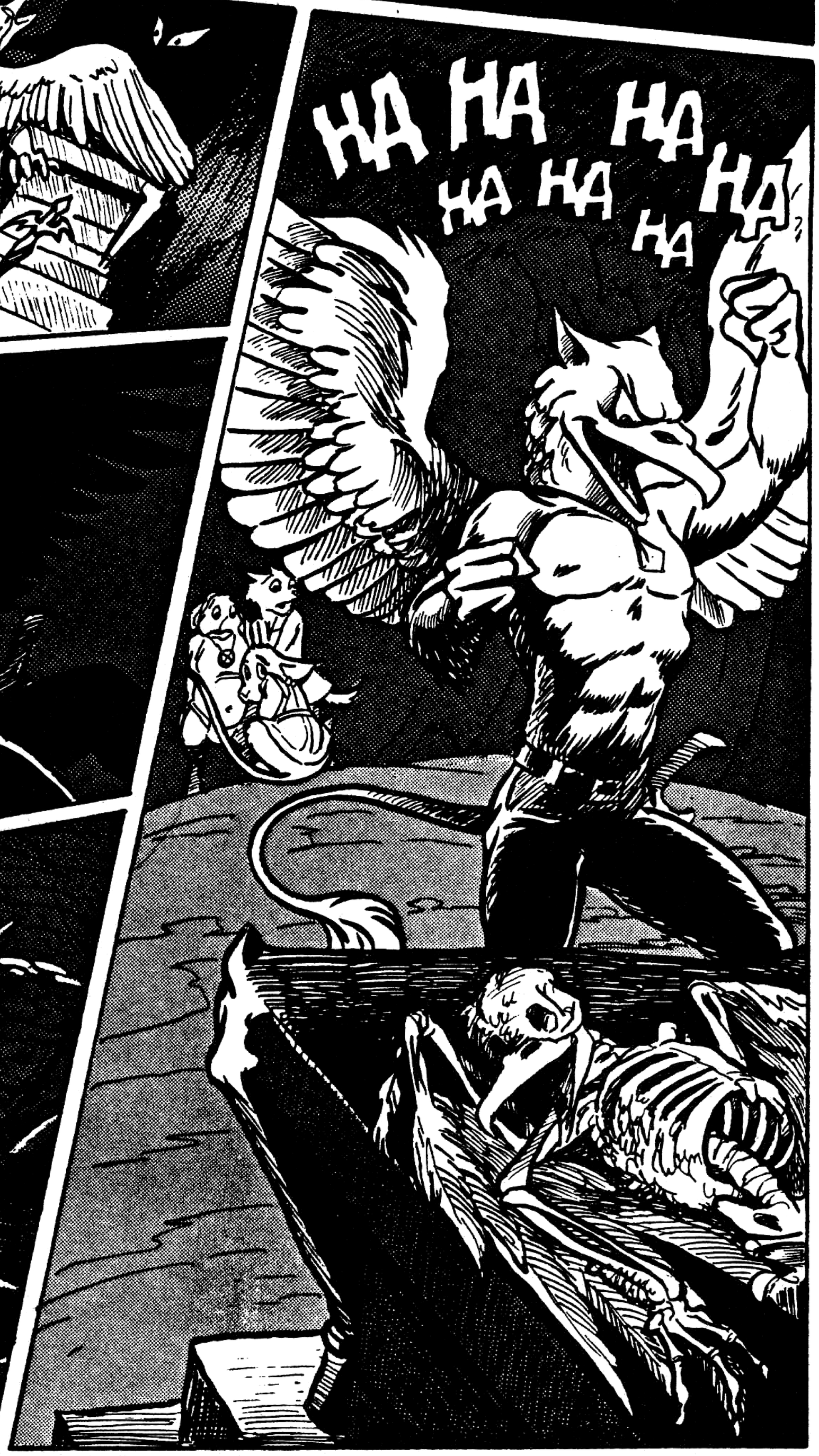
DONE!

KEPTIN!

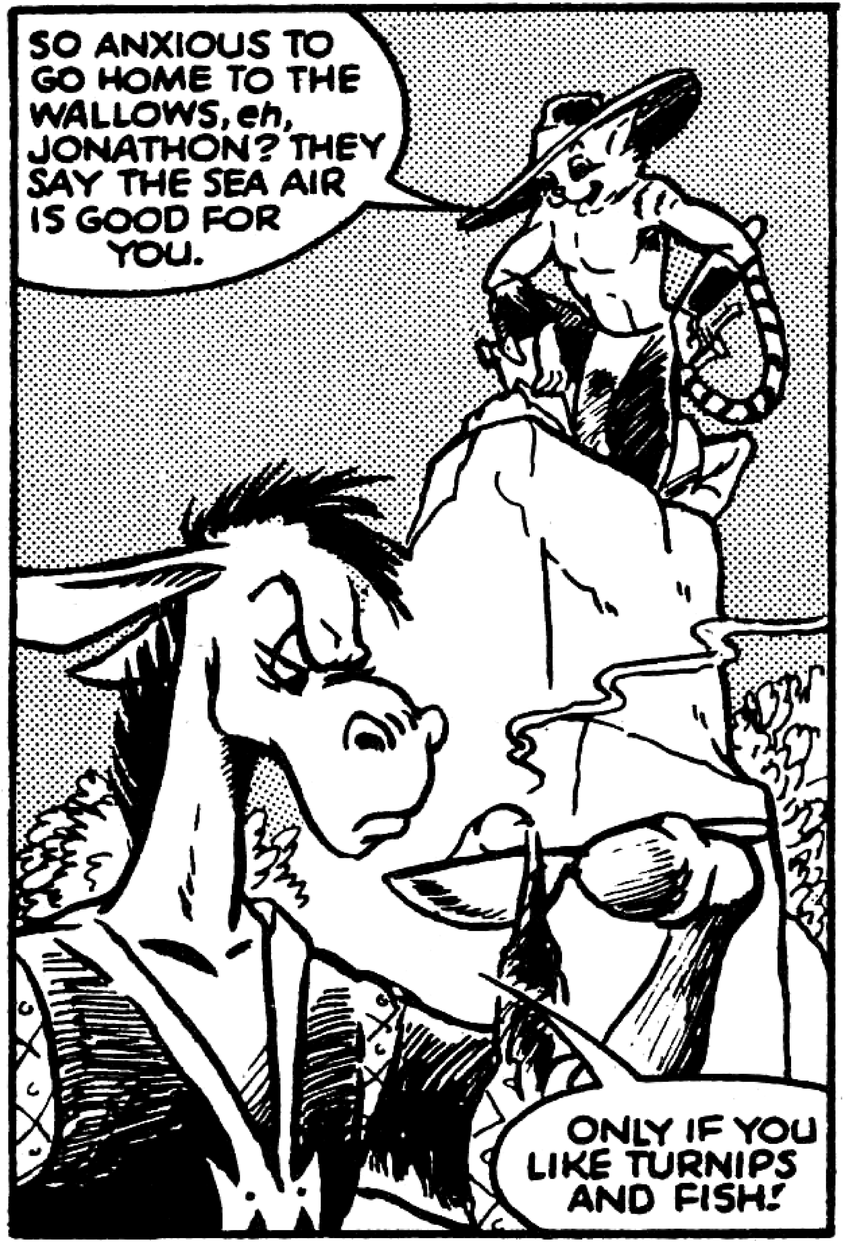
CUT YOURSELF, THEN! LET THE BLOOD FLOW! IN THE UNION OF BLOOD AND DUST DOES MAGIC LIE!

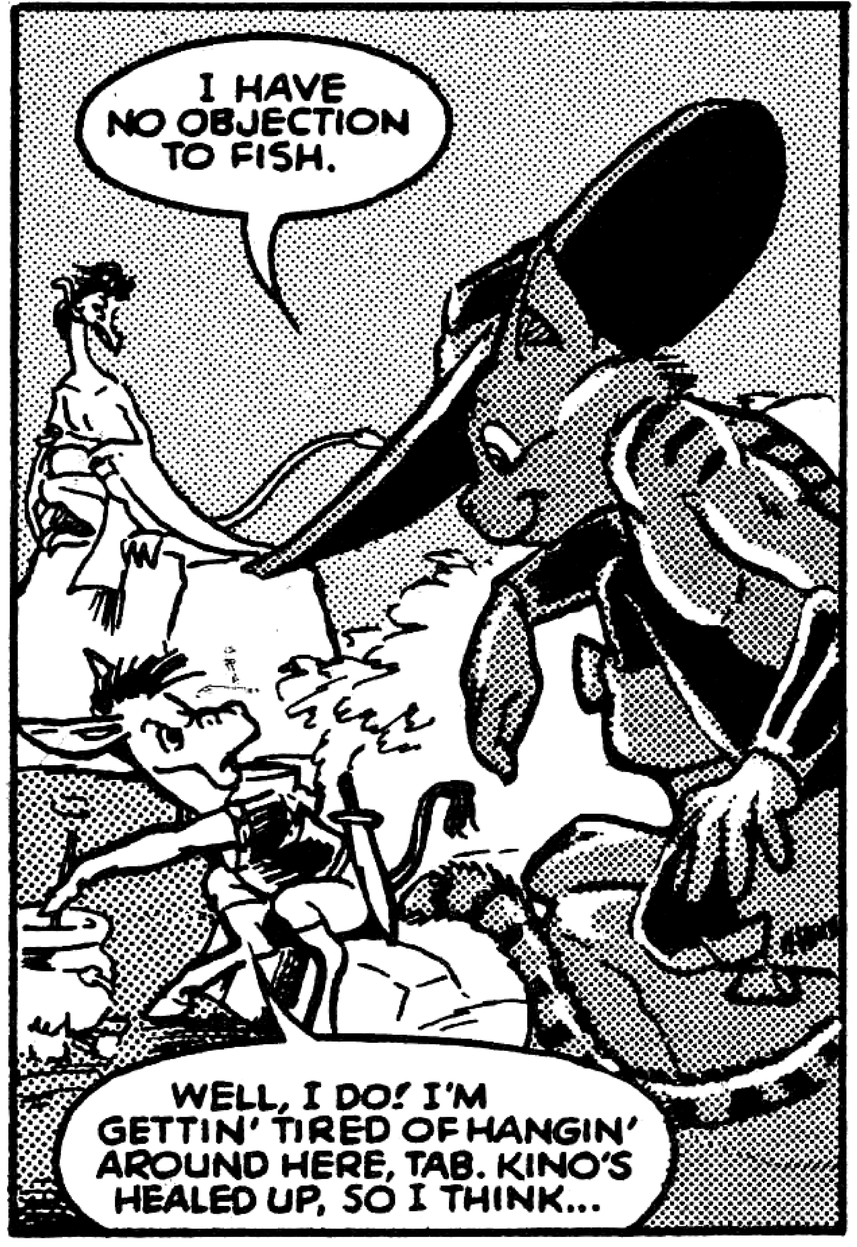




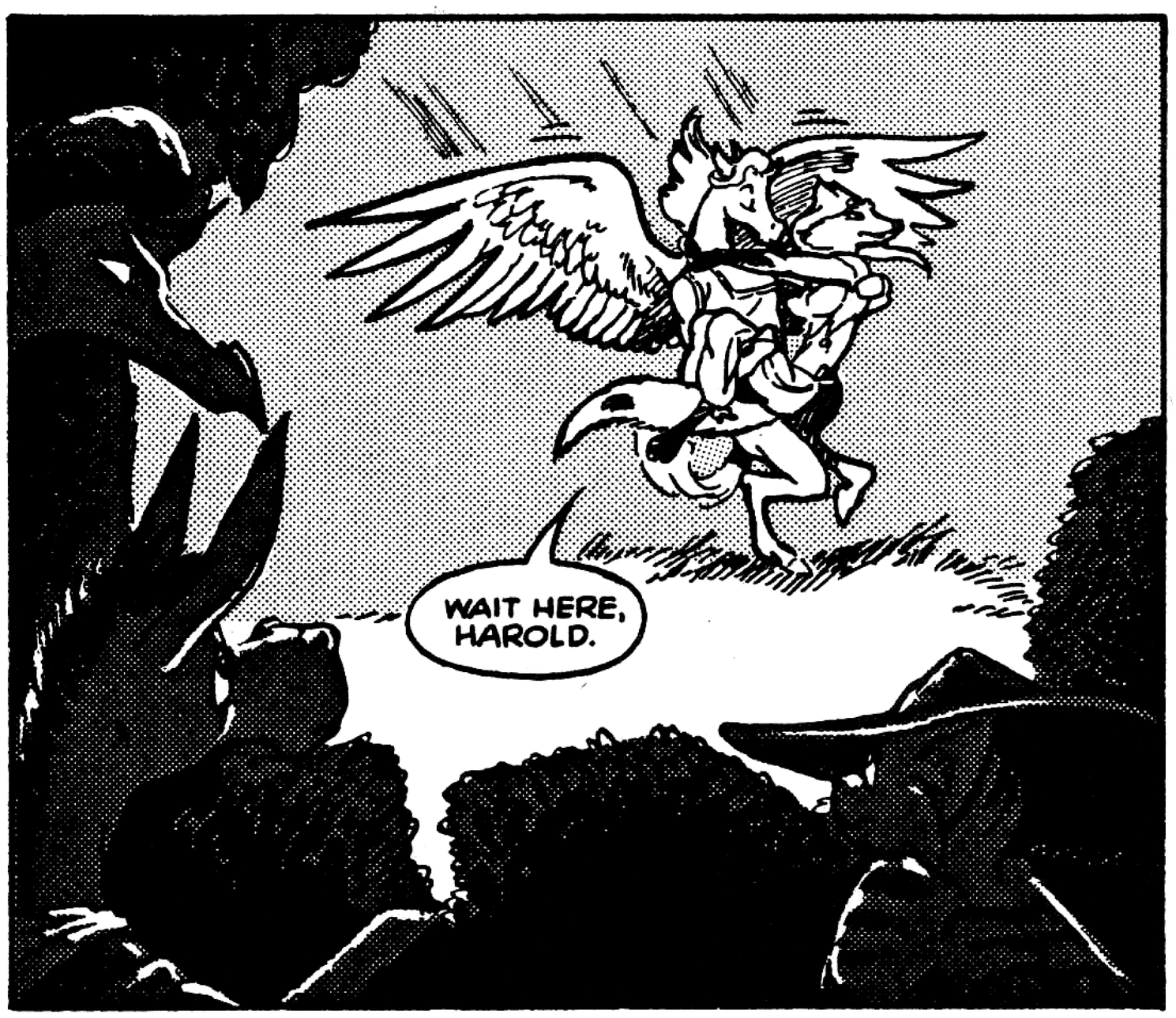

HA HA HA
HA HA HA

SPLOOSH
YOU GONNA EAT THAT RAW?
CRUNCH
OF COURSE. GOLDEN DRAGONS HAVE LIVED ON FISH FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.
AND IT CAN'T POSSIBLY BE ANY WORSE THAN YOUR TURNIP STEW.
Ugh! RIGHT! BUT TURNIPS ARE ALL WE'VE GOT LEFT. WE'VE BEEN OUT HERE MORE THAN A WEEK.

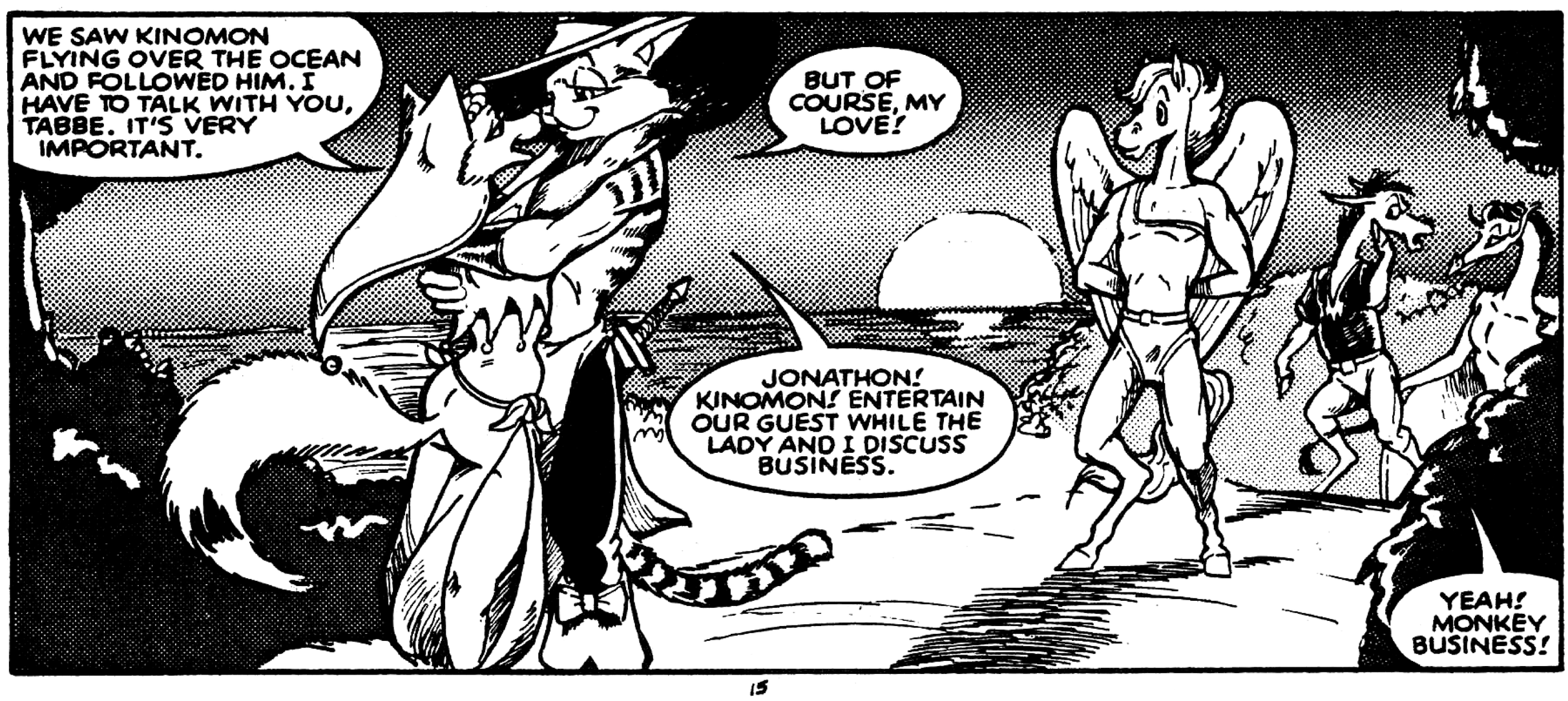

SO ANXIOUS TO GO HOME TO THE WALLOWS, eh, JONATHON? THEY SAY THE SEA AIR IS GOOD FOR YOU.
ONLY IF YOU LIKE TURNIPS AND FISH!

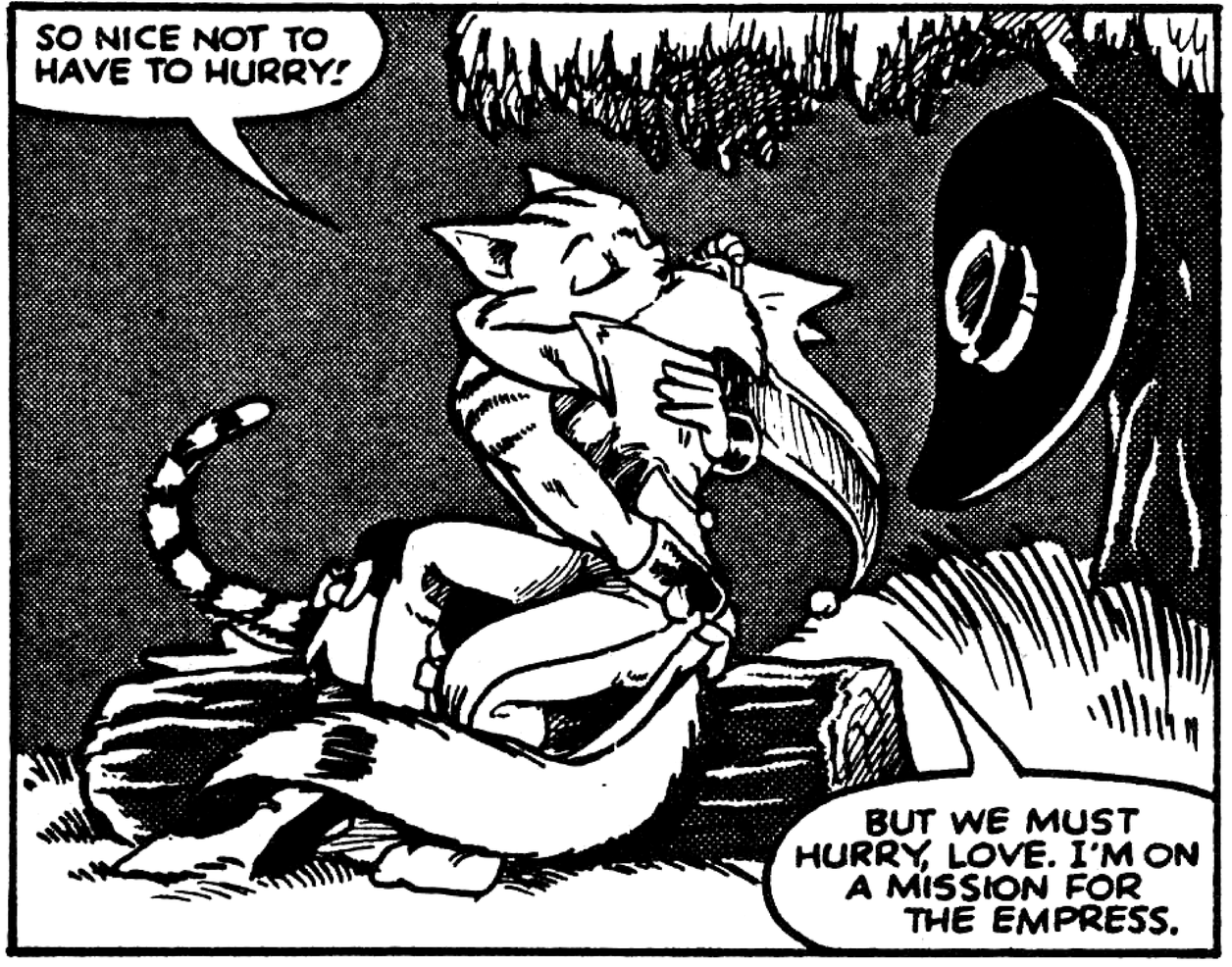

I HAVE NO OBJECTION TO FISH.
WELL, I DO! I'M GETTIN' TIRED OF HANGIN' AROUND HERE, TAB. KINO'S HEALED UP, SO I THINK...

QUIET!
SOMEONE'S COMING!


WAIT HERE, HAROLD.

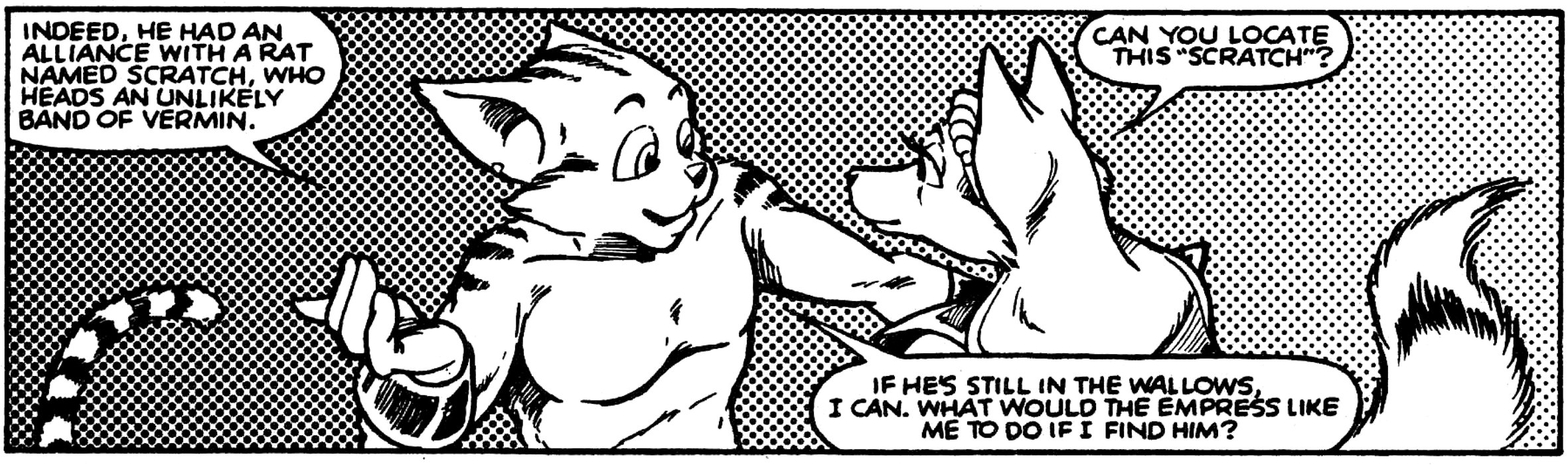
FATIMA, DEAREST! HOW EVER DID YOU FIND US?

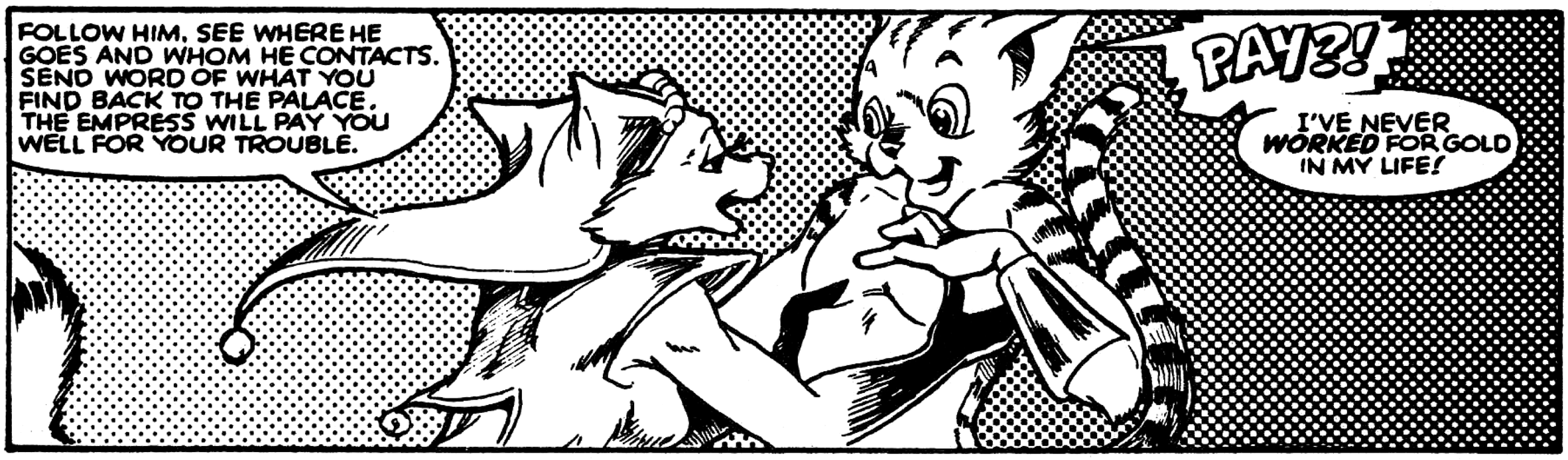

WE SAW KINOMON FLYING OVER THE OCEAN AND FOLLOWED HIM. I HAVE TO TALK WITH YOU, TABBE. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT.
BUT OF COURSE, MY LOVE!
JONATHON! KINOMON! ENTERTAIN OUR GUEST WHILE THE LADY AND I DISCUSS BUSINESS.
YEAH! MONKEY BUSINESS!


SO NICE NOT TO HAVE TO HURRY!
BUT WE MUST HURRY, LOVE. I'M ON A MISSION FOR THE EMPRESS.

WHAT DOES THE EMPRESS WANT WITH A MANGEY ALLEY-CAT LIKE MOI?
SHE NEEDS YOU TO LOCATE REGINALD PLUME.

CAPTAIN PLUME HAS DISAPPEARED. ALICIA THINKS HE MAY HAVE ALLIES IN THE WALLOWS.

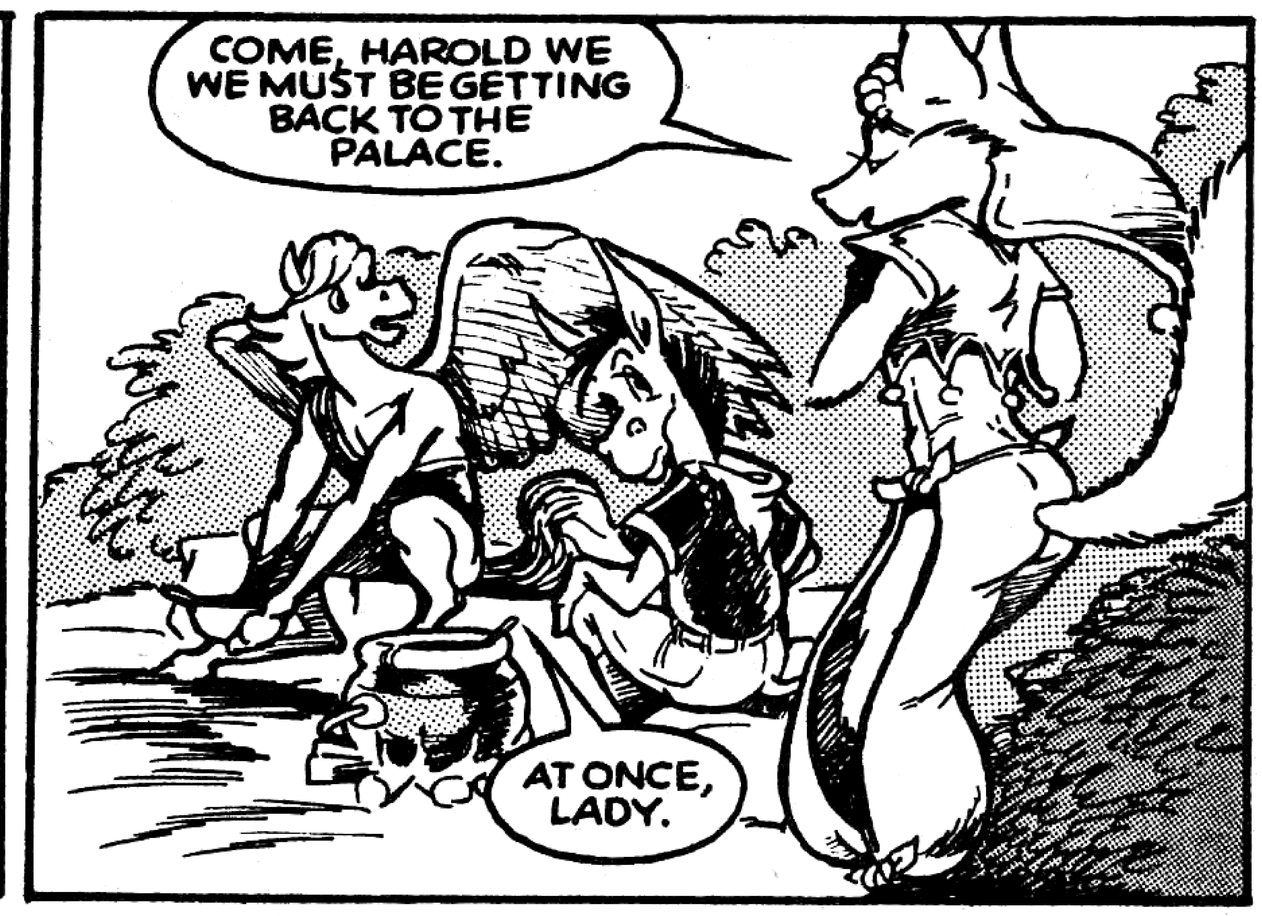

INDEED, HE HAD AN ALLIANCE WITH A RAT NAMED SCRATCH, WHO HEADS AN UNLIKELY BAND OF VERMIN.
CAN YOU LOCATE THIS "SCRATCH"?
IF HE'S STILL IN THE WALLOWS, I CAN. WHAT WOULD THE EMPRESS LIKE ME TO DO IF I FIND HIM?

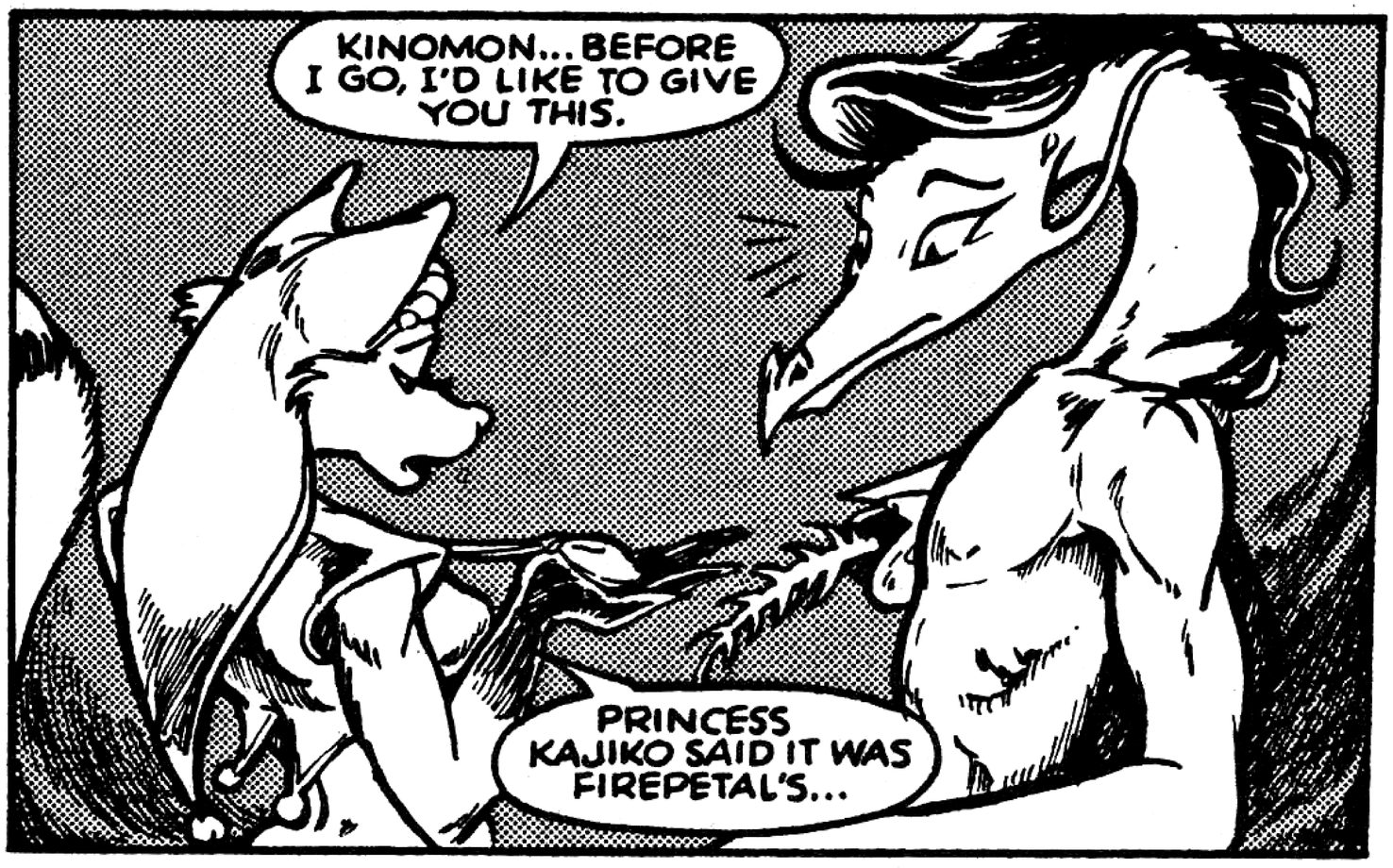

FOLLOW HIM. SEE WHERE HE GOES AND WHOM HE CONTACTS. SEND WORD OF WHAT YOU FIND BACK TO THE PALACE. THE EMPRESS WILL PAY YOU WELL FOR YOUR TROUBLE.
PAY?!
I'VE NEVER WORKED FOR GOLD IN MY LIFE!

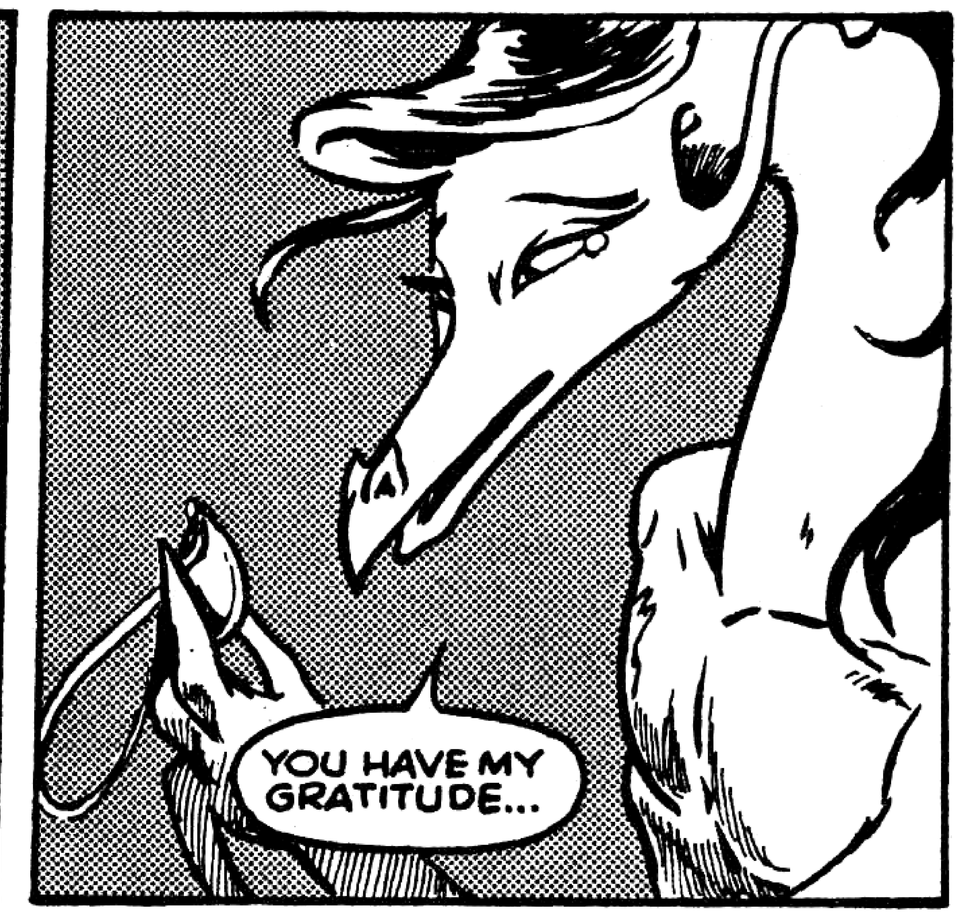
I INTEND TO "PAY" YOU, TOO...

SINCE YOU PUT IT THAT WAY, I DON'T SEE HOW I CAN REFUSE!

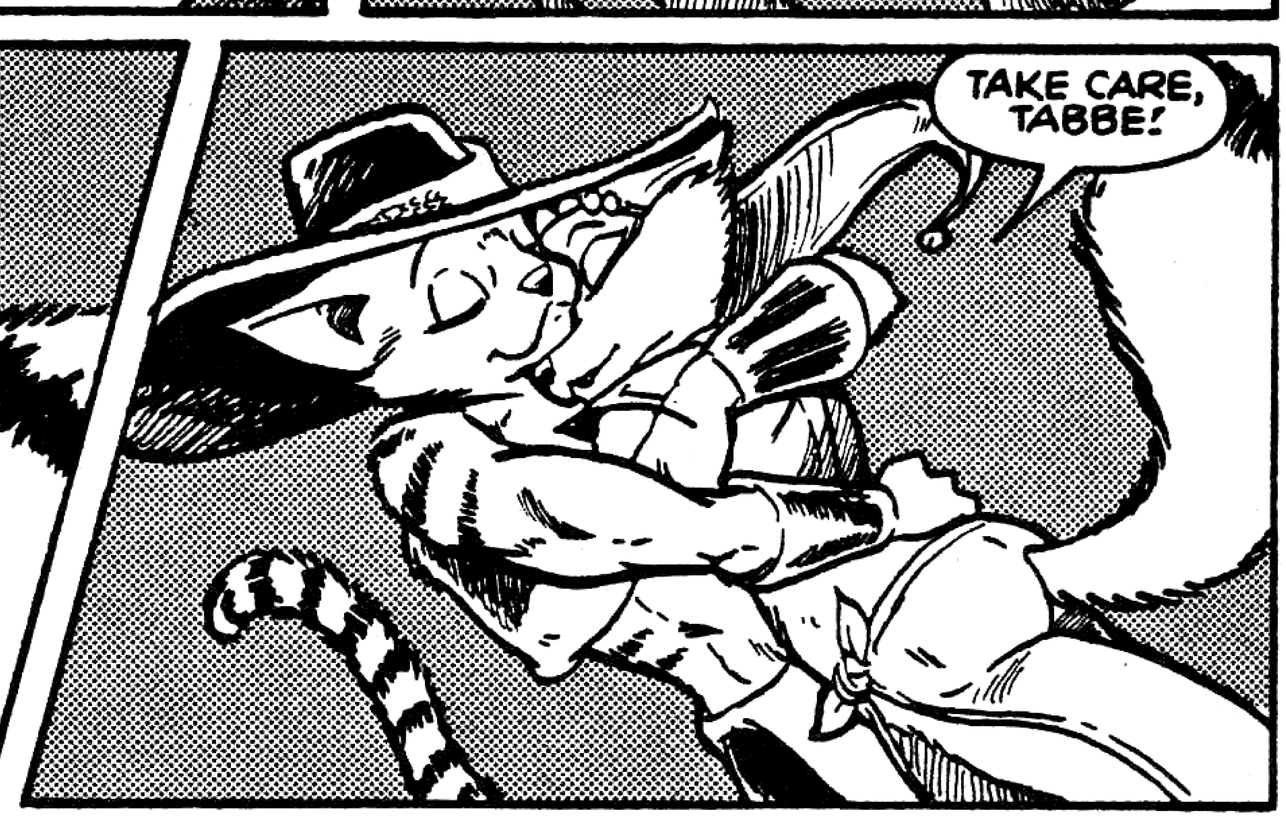
EXCELLENT! JUST NEEDS A TOUCH MORE PEPPER!
SWELL...

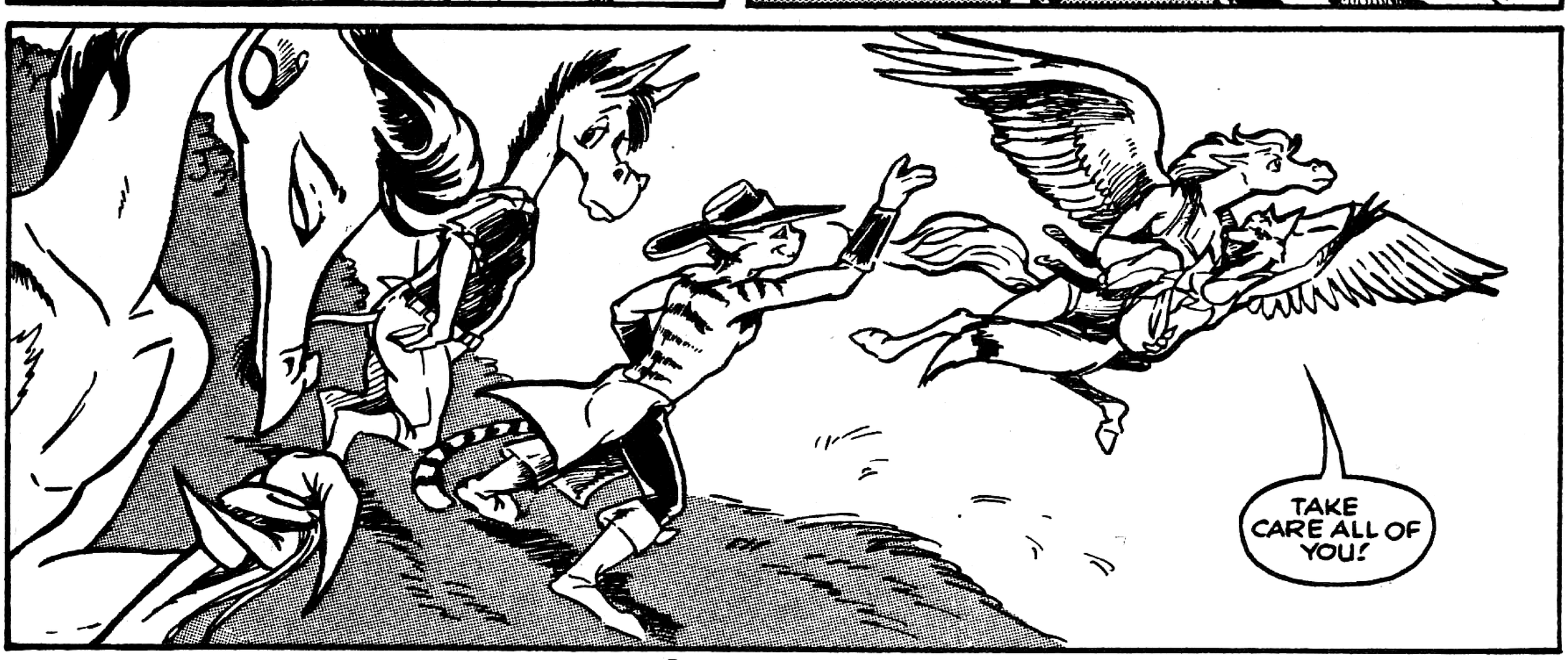

COME, HAROLD WE WE MUST BE GETTING BACK TO THE PALACE.
AT ONCE, LADY.


KINOMON... BEFORE I GO, I'D LIKE TO GIVE YOU THIS.
PRINCESS KAJIKO SAID IT WAS FIREPETAL'S...


YOU HAVE MY GRATITUDE...

I'M SO SORRY!


TAKE CARE, TABBE!


TAKE CARE ALL OF YOU!

THIS WILL DO NICELY.
IN FACT, IT'S PERFECT.
WHUMP!
CAREFUL, IDIOT! THOSE VOLUMES ARE PRICELESS!
THEY'RE JUSTA BUNCHA OLD BOOKS! I'LL DROP 'EM WHERE I WANT!
YOU'LL PUT THEM WHERE I TELL YOU...
NO ARGUE WITH HIM, GRUHT!
HE'S DONE NOTHIN' BUT GIVE ORDERS SINCE WE GOT BACK FROM THE SEA! HE AIN'T GOT NO GOLD AND I AIN'T SEEN NO MAGIC! TO HELL WITH HIM!
SOT

TOAD...
CLEAN UP THAT MESS.
ASSEMBLE YOUR PEOPLE, SCRATCH. I WISH TO INSPECT THEM.
Y-Y-YES, KEPTIN.
Oh, AND SCRATCH...
...DON'T ENTERTAIN ANY THOUGHTS ABOUT LEAVING MY EMPLOY. I WOULDN'T LIKE THAT... NOT AT ALL.
NO, SIR...

NO DOUBT YOU THINK ME VERY COLD...

I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO THINK, KAJIKO. I UNDERSTAND YOU FEEL A FIERCE LOYALTY TO THE GOLDEN THRONE, BUT TO SACRIFICE YOUR BROTHER TO IT WITHOUT HIS CONSENT...

WOULD YOU NOT SACRIFICE *YOUR* LIFE FOR EMPRESS ALICIA?

OF COURSE.

SO WOULD KINOMON. THE FACT THAT HE IS A WARRIOR IMPLIES HIS CONSENT. BUT YOU DID NOT COME HERE TO DISCUSS THE PAST. WHAT DID YOU NEED TO SEE ME ABOUT?

YOU SAID YOU WERE A SORCERESS. MIGHT I ASK WHO TAUGHT YOU?

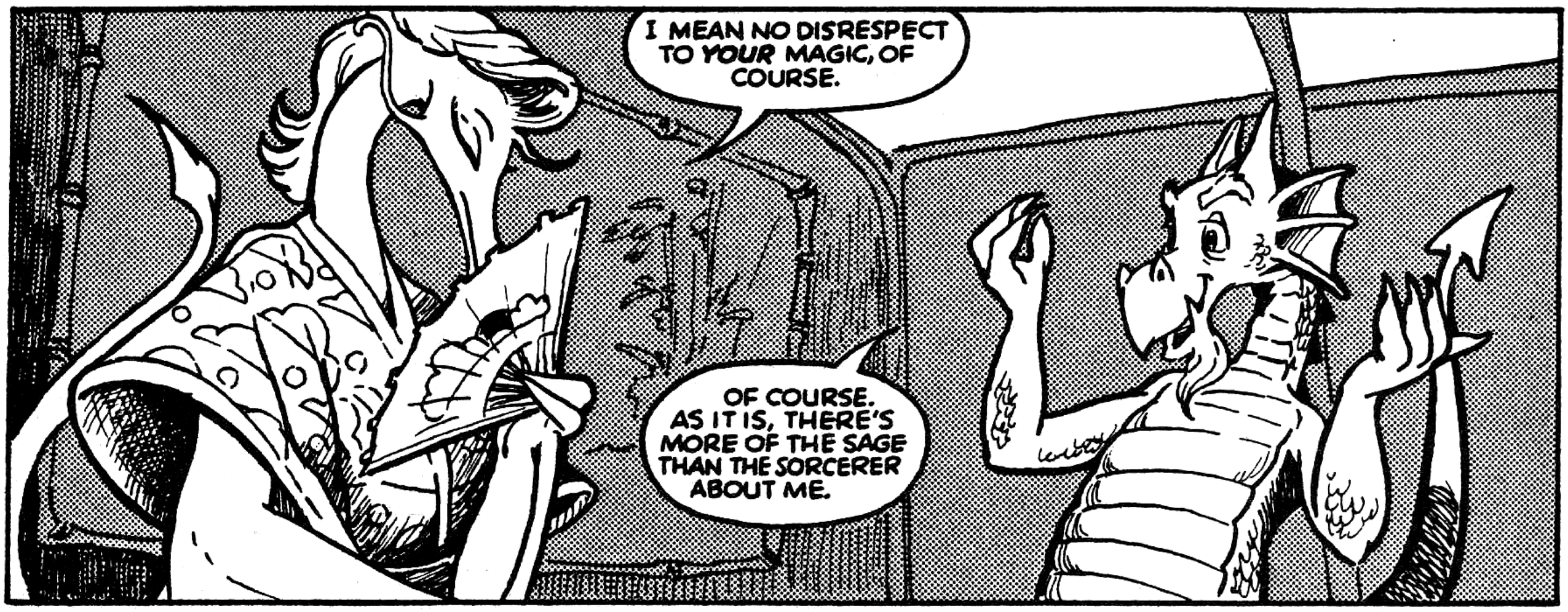
I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF STUDYING UNDER THE GREAT SADIJUTAH FOR TWO CENTURIES.

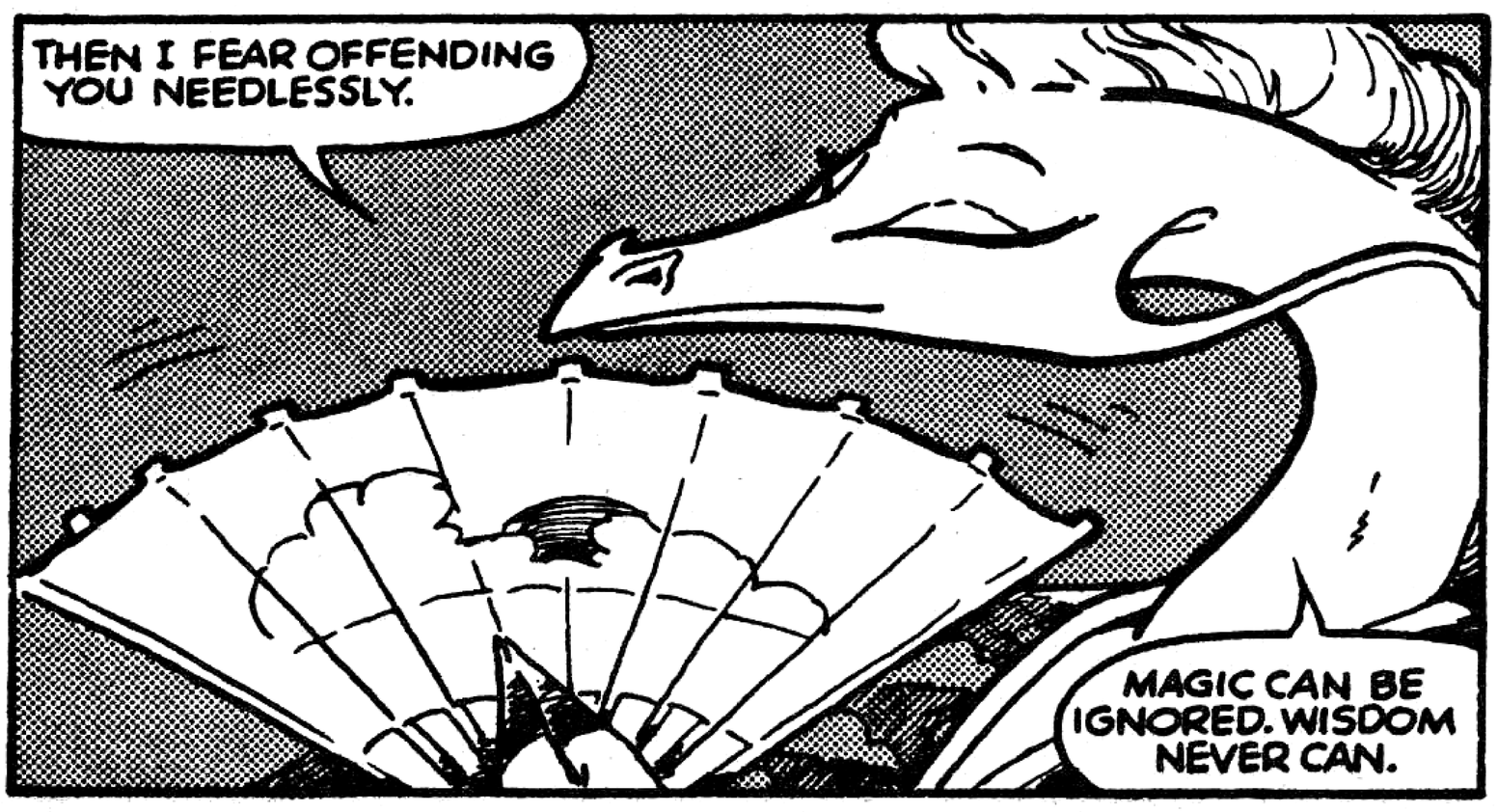
SADIJUTAH THE ELDER? THE FINEST WIZARD IN THE GOLDEN REALM?

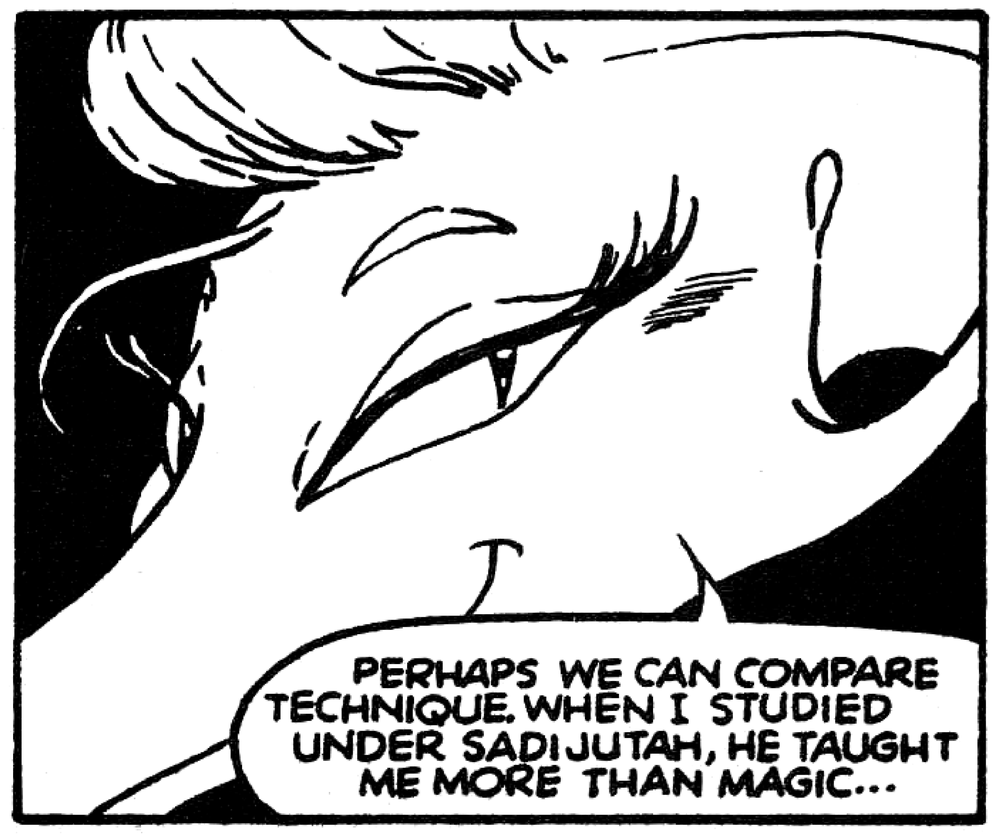
THE SAME. I FLATTER MYSELF BY THINKING I WAS ONE OF HIS MORE COMPETENT PUPILS.

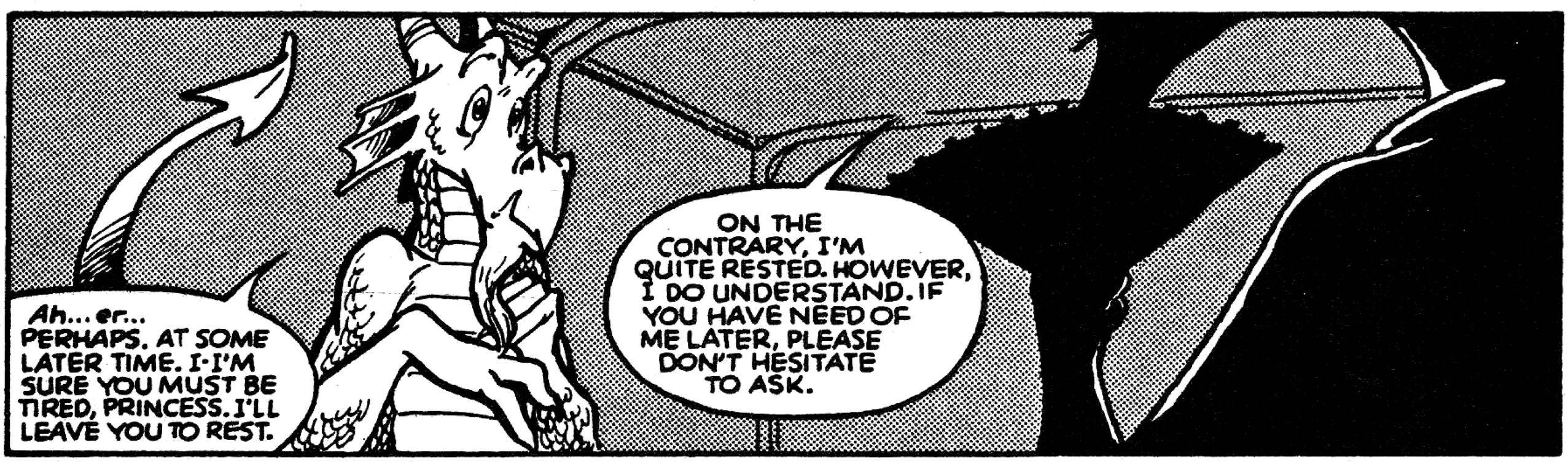
JOO-SAMA NEVER MENTIONED THIS.

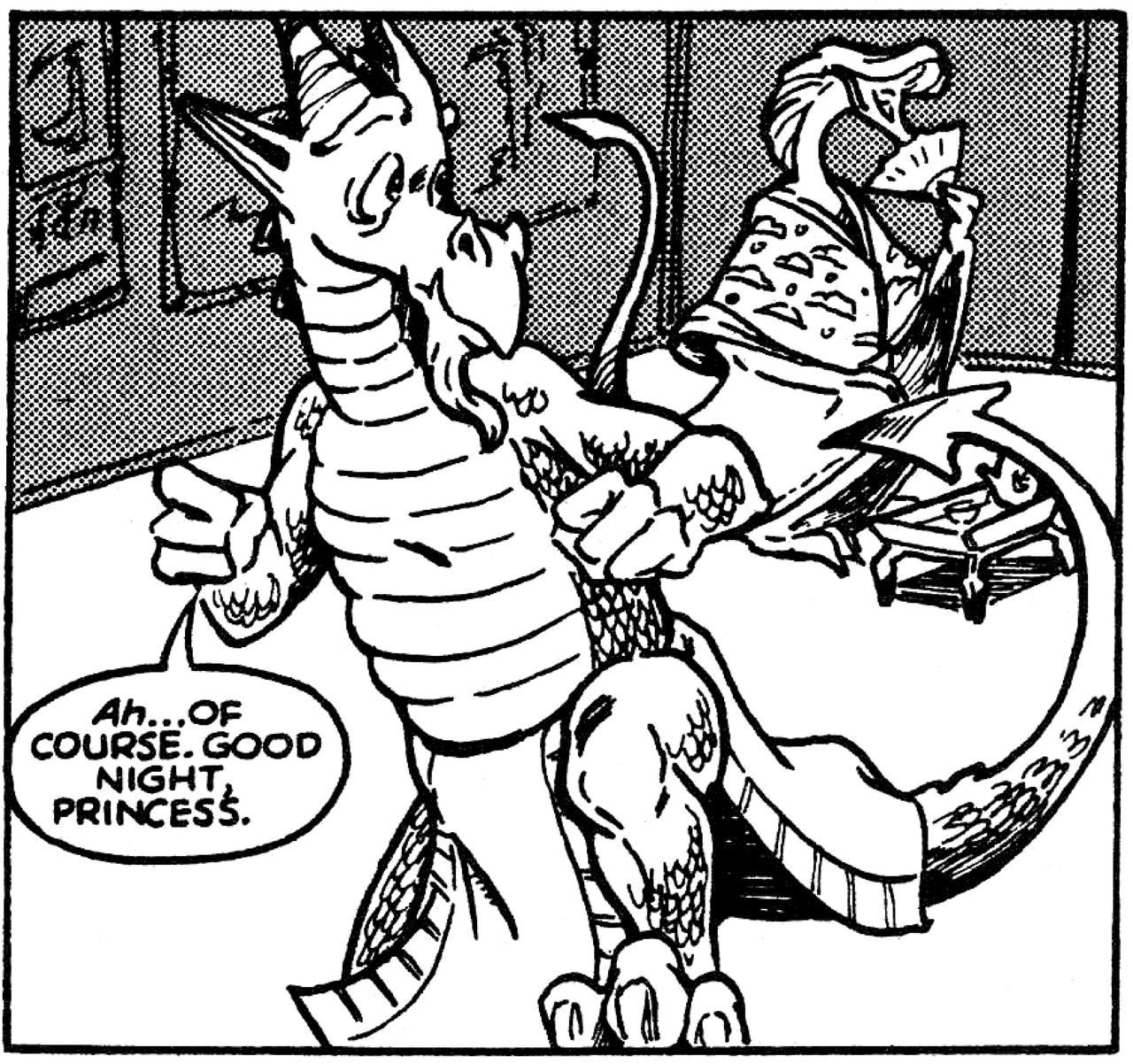
A WARRIOR CANNOT CAST SPELLS IN FLIGHT, THEREFORE OUR MAGIC CANNOT BE USED IN COMBAT. SINCE IT IS THE BUSINESS OF A WARRIOR TO FIGHT, WE TEND TO IGNORE MAGIC AS MERELY UTILITARIAN.


I MEAN NO DISRESPECT TO YOUR MAGIC, OF COURSE.
OF COURSE. AS IT IS, THERE'S MORE OF THE SAGE THAN THE SORCERER ABOUT ME.

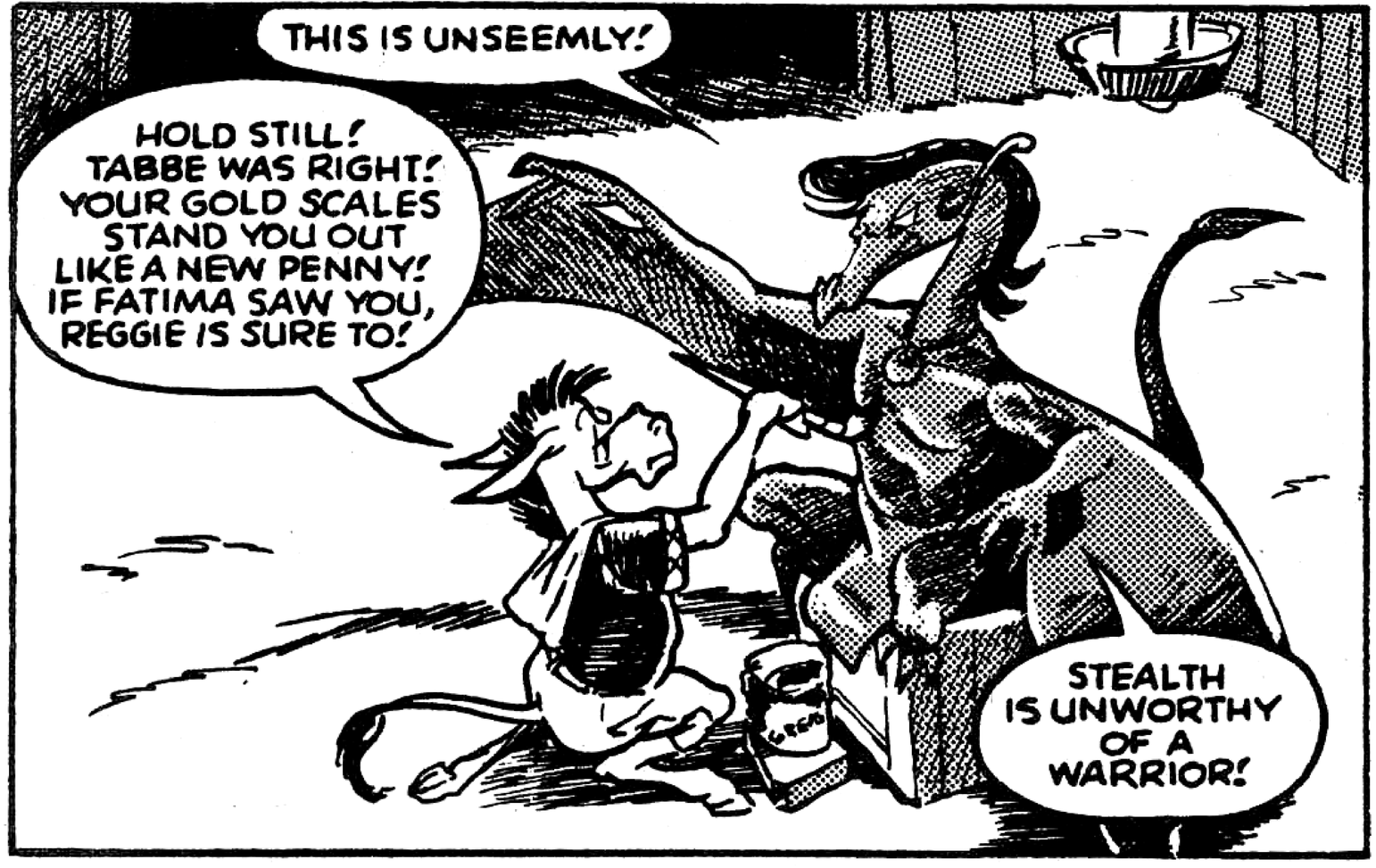

THEN I FEAR OFFENDING YOU NEEDLESSLY.
MAGIC CAN BE IGNORED. WISDOM NEVER CAN.


PERHAPS WE CAN COMPARE TECHNIQUE. WHEN I STUDIED UNDER SADIJUTAH, HE TAUGHT ME MORE THAN MAGIC...


Ah... er... PERHAPS. AT SOME LATER TIME. I-I'M SURE YOU MUST BE TIRED, PRINCESS. I'LL LEAVE YOU TO REST.
ON THE CONTRARY, I'M QUITE RESTED. HOWEVER, I DO UNDERSTAND. IF YOU HAVE NEED OF ME LATER, PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO ASK.


Ah... OF COURSE. GOOD NIGHT, PRINCESS.

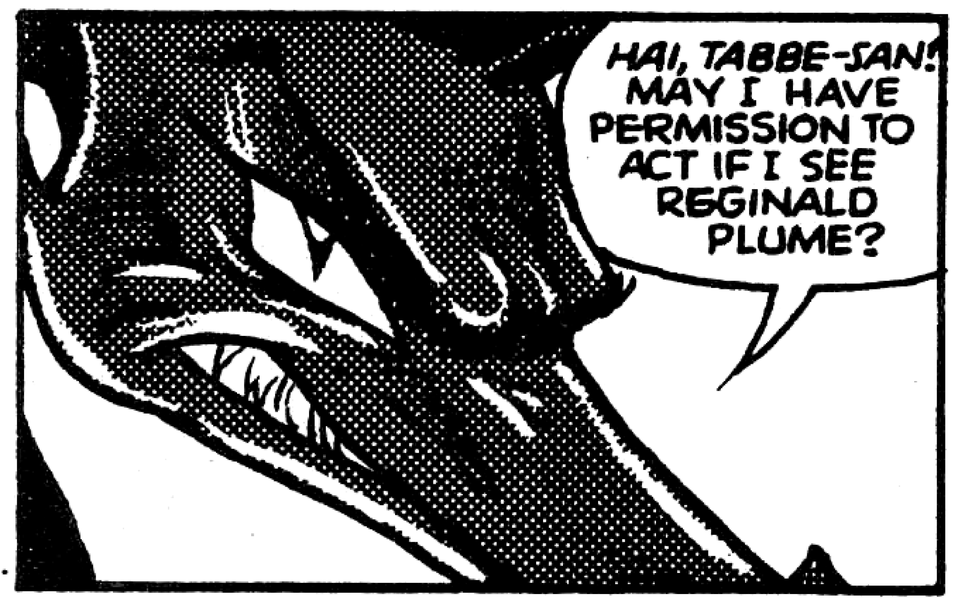
Sigh.
OYASUMI-NASAI, OCTAVIUS-CHAN.

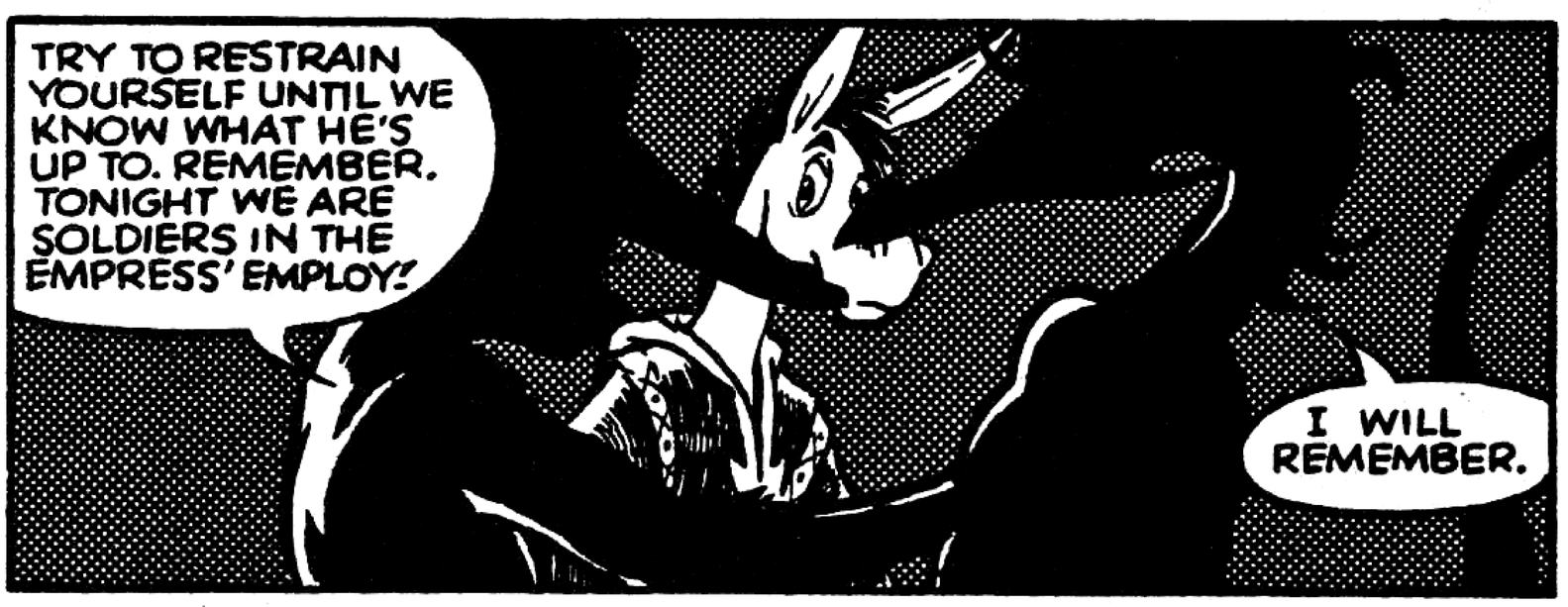

THIS IS UNSEEMLY!
HOLD STILL! TABBE WAS RIGHT! YOUR GOLD SCALES STAND YOU OUT LIKE A NEW PENNY! IF FATIMA SAW YOU, REGGIE IS SURE TO!
STEALTH IS UNWORTHY OF A WARRIOR!

SOMETIMES STEALTH IS THE ONLY WAY A GENERAL CAN EVEN THE ODDS!
YOU FIND SCRATCH AND COMPANY?

NO, BUT I DID NOTICE ACTIVITY DOWN BY THE SWAMP. SOMEONE IS MOVING INTO THE OLD WATCHTOWER.
WHO?
JE NE SAIS PAS. SOMEONE WHO HAS A VERY UGLY TOAD FOR A WATCHDOG.

C'EST EXCELLENT! NOW YOU WILL NOT ATTRACT SO MUCH ATTENTION! DO A QUICK SURVEILLANCE OF THE WATCHTOWER AND REPORT BACK TO ME.


HAI, TABBE-SAN! MAY I HAVE PERMISSION TO ACT IF I SEE REGINALD PLUME?


TRY TO RESTRAIN YOURSELF UNTIL WE KNOW WHAT HE'S UP TO. REMEMBER. TONIGHT WE ARE SOLDIERS IN THE EMPRESS' EMPLOY!
I WILL REMEMBER.

YOU THINK HE'LL SPOT PLUME?
I DOUBT IT. PLUME WON'T SHOW HIMSELF SO SOON AFTER FIREPETAL'S DEATH.

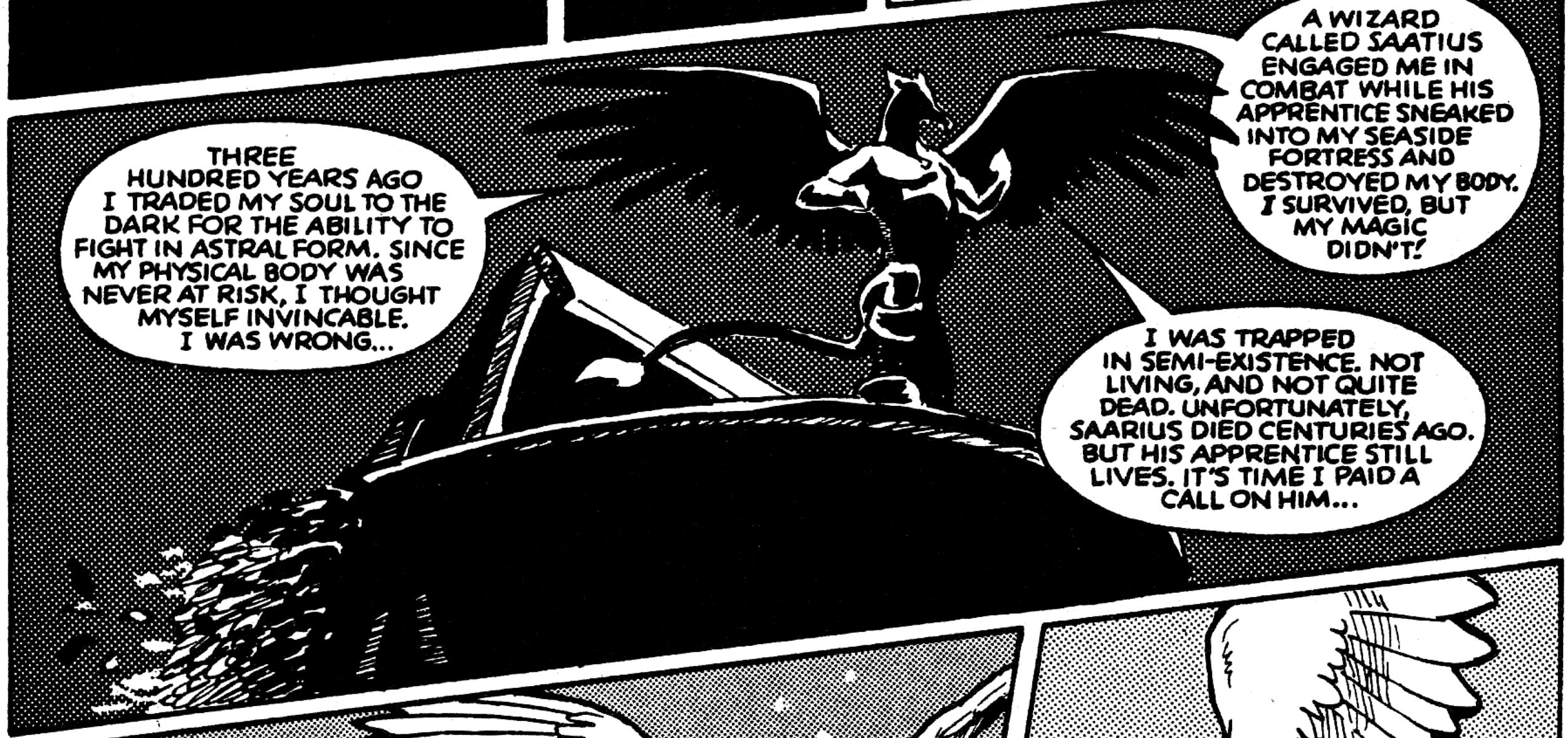
IN A WAY, THAT'S TOO BAD. I'D LIKE TO SEE THE DEAR CAPTAIN'S FACE WHEN HE FINDS HIMSELF ON THE BUSINESS END OF A VERY ANGRY DRAGON!

TABBE-SAN WAS RIGHT! THERE IS MUCH ACTIVITY AT THE OLD TOWER. I SEE PERHAPS FIFTY DOMESTIQUES. MOST OF THEM ARMED!
AND FOR THE FIFTY I SEE, THERE ARE FIFTY I DON'T SEE!
SOMEONE IS MASSING AN ARMY.

THREE HUNDRED YEARS...

THREE HUNDRED LONG YEARS...

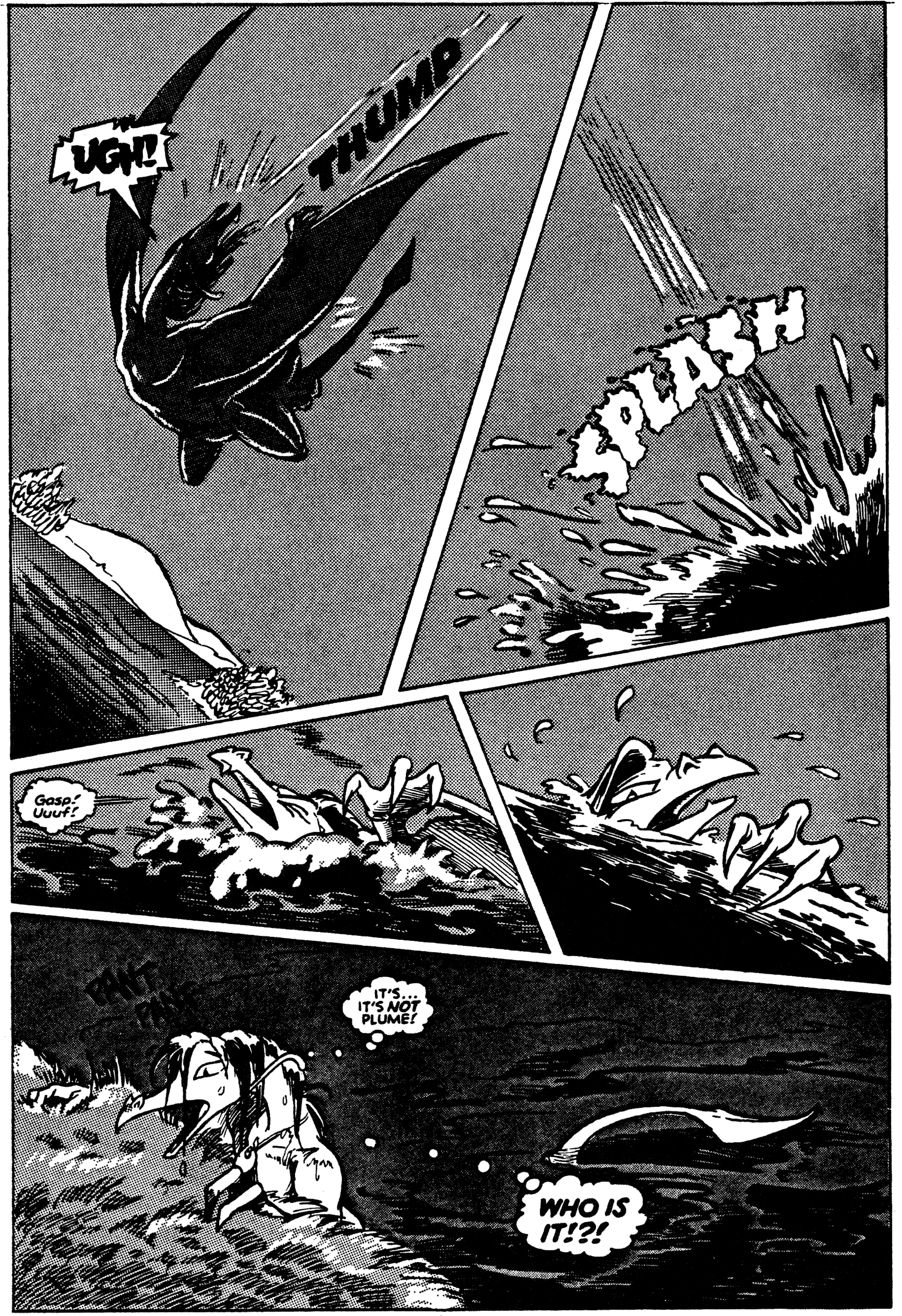
KEPTIN! WHAT YOU DOING UP HERE?
REMEMBERING, SCRATCH. REMINDING MYSELF OF DEBTS WHICH NEED TO BE PAID...


THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO I TRADED MY SOUL TO THE DARK FOR THE ABILITY TO FIGHT IN ASTRAL FORM. SINCE MY PHYSICAL BODY WAS NEVER AT RISK, I THOUGHT MYSELF INVINCABLE. I WAS WRONG...
A WIZARD CALLED SAATIUS ENGAGED ME IN COMBAT WHILE HIS APPRENTICE SNEAKED INTO MY SEASIDE FORTRESS AND DESTROYED MY BODY. I SURVIVED, BUT MY MAGIC DIDN'T!
I WAS TRAPPED IN SEMI-EXISTENCE. NOT LIVING, AND NOT QUITE DEAD. UNFORTUNATELY, SAARIUS DIED CENTURIES AGO. BUT HIS APPRENTICE STILL LIVES. IT'S TIME I PAID A CALL ON HIM...

WHERE YOU GO?!
TO THE PALACE.
YOU NO GO THERE, KEPTIN! IS DANGEROUS! THEY KILL YOU IF THEY CATCH YOU!

THEY CAN TRY...

WHAT?!
IT IS PLUME!
HE'S HEADING FOR THE PALACE! HE MUST BE INSANE!
THERE IS NO TIME TO REPORT TO TABBE-SAN! I MUST DO SOMETHING!
FLUMP
HE'S GONE!
WHERE...?


UGH!
THUMP
SPLASH
Gasp! Uuuf!
IT'S... IT'S NOT PLUME!
WHO IS IT!?!

"COMPETENT PUPIL", eh? I'LL JUST BET SHE WAS!
POOR OLD SADIJUTAH PROBABLY NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM!
FLAP
CRASH
WHAT?
BOOM
JUST THE WIND...I'D BETTER SECURE THOSE DRAPES BEFORE THE STORM DOES ANY MORE DAMAGE.
AHH!
PLUME! YOU BASTARD!

GUESS AGAIN, OLD FRIEND. THIS TIME, FORGET THE OBVIOUS.
GODS... TYPHON!
NICE OF YOU TO REMEMBER. YET HOW COULD YOU FORGET? DESTROYING MY BODY SECURED YOUR PLACE AS SAARIUS' HEIR.
HOW'D YOU GET FREE?
THAT'S A LONG STORY. ABOUT THREE HUNDRED YEARS' WORTH. I HAVEN'T GOT TIME TO DISCUSS IT WITH YOU NOW...
...I JUST THOUGHT I'D DROP BY TO PAY MY RESPECTS AND GIVE YOU A LITTLE TOKEN OF MY APPRECIATION!
KLUFCOMP
HA HA HA HA